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“THE FUTURE IN THE INSTANT”: POSTHUMANISM(S) IN EARLY MODERN  
ENGLISH DRAMA

by

Farrah Lehman

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: English

Under the Supervision of Professor Stephen M. Buhler

Lincoln, Nebraska

March, 2010

“THE FUTURE IN THE INSTANT”: POSTHUMANISM(S) IN EARLY MODERN  
ENGLISH DRAMA

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University of Nebraska, 2010

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This dissertation examines prominent points of intersection between early modern English theatrical practices and posthumanist, post-cybernetic new media theory as a means of interrogating assumptions about “media narratives” (here, the development of dramatic blank verse), proto-Brechtian anti-illusionism, and sensory encounter related to the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth century stage. The arguments presented here in part rely on the work of three present-day critics: Mark B.N. Hansen, N. Katherine Hayles, and Brian Massumi, all of whom explore posthumanist theory while addressing possibilities for posthumanist practices within the humanities. Examining a wide range of texts, including plays and pro- and anti-theater tracts, initially printed or performed between 1560 and 1640, I argue that there were aspects of early modern English drama that were about signs but not signifiers, performance but not representation; early modern dramatists, performers, and supporters and opponents of the theater were not necessarily concerned with how bodies, events, and sins were represented, but with why (un)certain aspects of bodies, events, and sins/signs could not be represented back to the mind or consciousness.

## AUTHOR'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The posthumanist theory that this dissertation engages for the most part rejects “origin stories,” but I want to invest some space here in order to express my gratitude to those humans who played roles in the development of this project. First, my advisor, Stephen Buhler, whose own work rekindled my interest in performance theory, has always been accessible and extraordinarily supportive of my scholarship and teaching throughout the last five years. I am also grateful for the academic support, detailed feedback, and guidance offered by committee members Kenneth Price, Marco Abel, and Julia Schleck. And although my thinking here departs considerably from Lacanian modes of thought and practice, I am still influenced by the scholarship of Susan Zimmerman, who taught me how to “do” theory and provided me with a host of excellent reasons to enter a doctoral program.

For listening to and commenting on early versions of the four chapters presented here, much gratitude is due to Raymond Siemens, Brett Hirsch, and the presenters on the New Technologies and Renaissance Studies panels at the 2007, 2008, and 2009 Renaissance Society of America meetings; Thomas Cartelli, Katherine Rowe, and the participants in the “Shakespeare on Screen in Theory and Practice” seminar at the Folger Shakespeare Library; and the Medieval-Renaissance group at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Also, Bradley Clissold and Jennifer Lokash offered valuable editorial feedback on Chapter 1.

Luiz Sousa and Robert Faulkner introduced me to *Hamlet: The Text Adventure* (the web-based game that I close read in Chapter 1) and the peculiars of the text-

adventure genre in general. Lesley Kruter, Juliana Han, Natalie Sousa, and Mike Den have offered consistent, near-unconditional support. A final acknowledgement: Ralph Lehman lost my bachelors' and masters' diplomas in 2001 and 2004 respectively, when he took them to be framed and then forgot where he'd left them. He should have been here to lose my doctoral diploma too.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: ARCHIVAL PERFORMANCE: NEW MEDIA SHAKESPEARES AND EARLY MODERN METATHEATRICS .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2: “SPEAK THE SPEECH”: DRAMATIC BLANK VERSE AS A NEW MEDIUM ON THE ENGLISH STAGE .....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>CHAPTER 3: SIGNALETIC FORCES: SINS, SIGNS, AND CONTEXT .....</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>CHAPTER 4: “WE CONFOUND KNOWLEDGE WITH KNOWLEDGE”: A POSTHUMANIST “READING” OF WEBSTER’S <i>THE WHITE DEVIL</i> .....</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>CONCLUSION: POSTHUMANISM IN THE HUMANITIES .....</b>	<b>136</b>

## INTRODUCTION

This dissertation examines prominent points of intersection between early modern English theatrical practices and posthumanist, post-cybernetic new media theory. Though I examine a wide range of texts (including plays and pro- and anti-theater tracts) initially printed or performed between 1560 and 1640, the arguments presented here rely mainly on the work of three present-day critics: Mark B.N. Hansen, N. Katherine Hayles, and Brian Massumi. These three critics differ considerably in their approaches to language and phenomenology, but all explore posthumanist theory while addressing possibilities for posthumanist practices within the humanities. Their work not only demonstrates how posthumanist new media theory and posthumanism in general challenge humanistic thinking and critique the importance of meaning creation to reading and spectatorship but also makes clear that posthumanism as a mode of scholarship and practice needs not be considered either entirely anti-humanistic or intrinsically unfriendly to the humanities.

Before I move forward with it, this project's argument that new media theory, posthumanism, and early modern English drama ostensibly "speak to" one another warrants a relatively brief definition and description of posthumanism, which might be described as a strong critique of Western philosophy's traditional valorization of cogito and consciousness (i.e. "I think therefore I am and I am human because I, unlike any other creature or machine, am capable of high-order rational thought"), a concept that, as Jessica Wolfe has suggested in her study of the Renaissance "iron man," was not unheard of in early modern England, and was in fact the source of much human-centered anxiety.<sup>i</sup> Posthumanism connects to "new media" in that it relies specifically on cybernetic

concepts in order to critique the assumptions that consciousness belongs to humans and that reading and spectatorship are primarily acts of meaning creation.

Like modernism and postmodernism, posthumanism questions and rejects the idea of a universal human essence. According to Neil Badmington's genealogy, posthumanist theory's critique of consciousness actually begins with modernist thought, first with Marx and Engels' contesting humanism's core concept of a "natural human essence which exists outside of history, politics, and social relations" (Badmington 5) and then, perhaps surprisingly for some, develops further via Freud's theories of psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalysis, Badmington explains, "took the challenge to humanism one stage further" when Freud "unmasked [the human] as a creature motivated by desires which escape the rules of consciousness" (6). Freud pointed out, in other words, that humans were not fundamentally rational beings determined by conscious thought.

Later, Lacan would take issue with humanist (mis)readings of Freud that served "to shore up the subject of consciousness" rather than critique its role in Western philosophy (6-7). Interrogating the assumption that consciousness is what makes "us" human, posthumanist theory exposes the possibility that ever since Descartes constituted himself as a thinking subject, Western subjects have had no choice but to constitute themselves on the basis of their presumptively unique rationality; the liberal subject, under this Cartesian constraint, no longer seems quite so liberal.

Posthumanist theory is not, of course, limited to alternative readings of Marx, Freud, and Lacan; it also works with concepts derived from cybernetics in order to question the primacy of the rational, thinking human mind. As Katherine Hayles puts it, one of posthumanism's goals is to "transform[] the question of "who can think" into



“what can think,” thereby “bring[ing] into question the characteristics of the liberal subject” (*Posthuman* xiii). When she interrogates the role that consciousness has played in Western thought, Hayles finds that it is simply an “epiphenomenon; an evolutionary upstart trying to claim that it is the whole show when in actuality it is a minor sideshow” (3).

Consciousness, even if it is not the “minor sideshow” that Hayles insists it is, may exist outside of and without the human, a possibility made imaginable by recent work in programming computers that do not simply simulate consciousness but apparently operate on a conscious level. Though there are indeed real-world examples of such phenomena,<sup>ii</sup> the mere plausibility of biologic robots and non-biologic rational thought in a post-cybernetic era poses a serious challenge to humanist assumptions about who (or what) “owns” rational thought. Hayles, in fact, believes that “it is only a question of time before the activities performed by these and other machines become so mind-like that [the question of *whether* machines can possess intelligence] too will become an uninteresting or irrelevant question” (*Computer* 214).

Hayles is especially relevant to this project because of the posthumanist interventions that *How We Became Posthuman* (1999) and *My Mother Was a Computer* (2005) stage in literary studies. Rethinking the concepts of point-of-view and signification in posthumanist terms, Hayles considers the implications for literature of the notion that “in cyberspace, point-of-view does not emanate from character; rather, the pov literally *is* the character” (*Posthuman* 35) and describes signification in terms of a “flickering signifier” rather than in terms of the Lacanian rhetoric of presence and absence familiar to poststructuralist thought. Meanwhile, Hansen, whose work seeks to

rethink phenomenology (perhaps paradoxically) in Deleuzian terms, and Massumi, whose stance is more anti-phenomenological, have both expressed concerns that even as cognitive theory and neuroscience are explaining more of the “mind” via the “brain,” some literary theorists continue to dematerialize the body/brain even as they (re)materialize history and culture.<sup>iii</sup> As all three critics have suggested, posthumanism can also “work” with literary studies because of the ways in which it challenges a number of underlying assumptions about rationality and the relationship between the senses, brain, and mind, assumptions worth taking into account when reading – and perhaps in some cases performing – early modern texts that concern themselves with sensory experience.

This project of exploring intersections between posthumanist/post-cybernetic new media theory and early modern English drama (and also searching for posthumanist moments on the pre-humanist, or at least pre-19<sup>th</sup> century humanist, Renaissance stage) began as a seminar paper about Shakespeare’s presence on the World Wide Web. My initial research yielded some non-exactly-surprising conclusions, the first of which was that most hits on “Shakespeare” in Google and other popular search engines led directly to content mills obviously intended to inundate homework-help-seeking students with advertisements. Meanwhile, the most attractive, well-designed sites were often those that presented the historically nonsensical argument that Shakespeare’s plays were clandestinely written by the seventeenth Earl of Oxford, incorrectly suggesting to Web surfers seeking information about the authorship of Shakespeare’s plays that the debate about whether one man wrote another man’s plays is legitimate in an early modern context. (Clearly, the “origin stories” that posthumanist feminist critic Donna Haraway

dismantles abound in some circles.) There were, however, some useful resources available, the most successful (in terms of sustained interest and financial support) of which were free online scholarly editions with sophisticated search functions and “archives” of images, playbooks, and other performance-related materials.

While exploring the reasons why online scholarly editions and archives of Shakespeare’s work had been successful while other resources had not, I found that although many scholars working in the digital humanities (known in previous decades as humanities computing) have offered fascinating critical examinations of practices related to archiving, data visualization, and markup languages, and have also carefully considered *what to do* with the sheer amount of data that have been archived in recent years,<sup>iv</sup> others have elected to consider how digital environments change the way that people who interact with them think, and also how they can affect the ways that readers read or engage with texts. These writers, several of whom I reference in Chapter 1, have claimed that hypertext and our interactions with digital interfaces substantiates or brings scholars back to the American reader-response criticism of the late 1970s and early 1980s, a school of thought which centered on a humanistic paradigm of individual readers or individuated communities or readers making (sometimes purely relativistic) meaning. Thus, my initial attempt to provide an account of “Shakespeare on the World Wide Web” developed into a set of specific concerns about how reading and spectatorship have been theorized in this so-called Internet age, or, more specifically, how *digital humanities* has in some venues been inextricably conflated with a *digital humanism*.

One serious challenge that posthumanist theory poses to literary studies is that it posits, according to its conception of the signifier, that meaning-making neither exhaustively describes nor is the most important component of spectatorship. As Hayles' theories of the "flickering signifier" (*Posthuman* Chapter 3) and code as pure behavior (*Computer* 45-51) and Massumi's Deleuzian conception of the radically non-personalizable sign indicate, words and images can act without necessarily being processed by a human mind. Under this paradigm, both interpretive practice and "histories at the level of the signifier" (in Catherine Belsey's terms) become seemingly impossible. However, as I will explain and demonstrate throughout this dissertation, work can be done within the literary humanities without always asking interpretive questions of what and how a text means and yet also without abandoning careful close reading. Without close reading or attention to textual evidence, after all, there is an actual risk of our work plunging into the reader-response-style relativism that I discuss below and in Chapter 1.

It will nevertheless prove worthwhile to address meaning for just a moment in order to consider precisely what the "humanism" that posthumanism follows, dismantles (for some), or interrogates *is*. The posthumanist media critics with whom this project engage interrogate something called "humanism"; critics working in the digital humanities often refer to themselves as "humanists"; those who argue that reader-response criticism can explain spectator or user interactions with digital environments concern themselves with the ways in which hyperfiction and virtual reality change "humanistic" cognitive processes. There are, I would argue, two humanisms with which posthumanism engages: the first is the reader-response version which focuses on

individual or community meaning-creation, and the second is the unexamined valorization of enlightenment as a privileged act performed by a truth-seeking researcher rather than an intrinsic property of an object or concept. Though the latter humanism claims to value objectivity while the former claims to value subjectivity, the two are very much related, centering on human interpretation and processing.

The latter humanism has never belonged exclusively to the humanities. It is present in early modern anatomy texts that advocated dissection as a means of phenomenizing and ultimately mastering the human body (see Chapter 4). And often, those who claim to *practice* humanist philosophy today express anxieties about relativism in the postmodernism-influenced humanities, mistakenly but perhaps understandably conflating postmodernism with relativism,<sup>v</sup> and using this critique in order to valorize and validate the “truth-seeking researcher” model of enlightenment without considering that model’s colonialist implications. This brand of humanism begins with the idea of scientifically studying the natural and rejecting the supernatural – a process of questioning ideologies that clearly does not conflict with postmodern thought – but quickly develops into a scenario in which only (implied: certain privileged) investigating humans can “shed light on” what has been kept in the dark.

There is a posthumanist response here that I want to elucidate (if I may persist in using a metaphor associated with enlightenment) in order to begin to demonstrate what posthumanism *can do* for the humanities. Gilles Deleuze, whose critique of phenomenology “breaks with the whole philosophical tradition which placed light on the side of spirit and made consciousness a beam of light which drew things out of their native darkness” and also serves as the basis for many of Hansen’s and Massumi’s

alternative- or anti-phenomenology arguments, writes that phenomenology operates “as if the intentionality of consciousness was the ray of an electric lamp” (*Cinema I* 60), as if consciousness and the meaning-making process that ensues from it were all-important.

Deleuze then offers an alternative in which

things are luminous by themselves without anything illuminating them: all consciousness *is* something, it is indistinguishable from the thing, that is from the image of light (61).

Theodor Adorno, whose critiques of the culture industry and the “pursuit of individual happiness” philosophy play a role in Chapter 1’s challenge to the virtual reality paradigm of point-of-view immersion, also presents a version of enlightenment that both argues against the necessity of conscious human involvement or rational observation and refuses to sacrifice the object. For instance, Adorno writes that “artworks participate in enlightenment because they do not lie. They do not feign the literalness of what speaks out of them” (*Aesthetic Theory* 79). No interference from a human enlightener or interpreter is required.

Taken together, Deleuze’s and Adorno’s arguments here suggest that “things” are always-already enlightened without the supernatural or transcendent and also without the involvement of privileged human enlighteners. Posthumanism’s critique of consciousness does not plunge us into darkness; rather, it deprivileges the subjective, humanistic act – for both “humanisms” described above – of shining the “light” of consciousness onto an object and suggests instead that light always-already belongs to the object.

The critique of the figure of the privileged human enlightener is certainly not a new idea within the field of Renaissance studies. During the last thirty years, cultural

critics working in this field have challenged the assumption that there can be what Stephen Greenblatt once labeled “pure, unfettered subjectivity” (Greenblatt 256). As a result, theories of the early modern body and early modern institutions have been marked by a poststructuralist turn, the basis of which is perhaps best articulated in Catherine Belsey’s cultural history of desire:

If signification is a detour, it is none the less the only track we can confidently claim to follow. The subject is what it speaks, writes, needs, signifies, and it is no more than that. (*Desire* 77).

The upshot of this view has been that it opens up the possibility that bodies were “constructed” differently in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries from how they are “constructed” today; this possibility de-universalizes textual and corporeal aspects of poetic and dramatic works previously considered so universal that historical and cultural specifics often had to be explained away as flaws.

Yet concepts of cultural constructedness have, as Hansen and Massumi have pointed out, ironically disembodied the body in suggesting that it is always and only determined by signifiers, never by physical flesh, never by the central and peripheral nervous systems. Posthumanism does, of course, reject biological essentialism; however, it acknowledges the fact that neurobiology is not only explaining more of the mind via the brain (body) but is also explaining more of the nervous system as independent of and prior to consciousness. Thus, it is possible via posthumanist theory to challenge the argument that if bodies are neither fully biologically determined nor consciousness-based, they must only comprise chains of signifiers. Further, posthumanism can serve as

a means for examining the asignifying and arepresentational aspects of early modern sensory encounters, some of which will be (re)considered in Chapters 3 and 4.

Chapter 1 begins with a critique of the interactivity and immersion (or, virtual reality) paradigms on which a number of theories about the intersections between new media and literature are based. In exposing the interactivity – and, by extension, reader-response – paradigm as ethically and pedagogically problematic, this chapter seeks to provide a foundation for the turn to posthumanist, post-cybernetic new media concepts in subsequent chapters. Specifically, the first chapter asks why digital Shakespeare projects that archive versions of the plays and related artifacts have been more successful in terms of longevity and academic interest than those that attempt to “perform” the plays have been; it finds an answer in the fact that many performances rely on the paradigms of interactivity and especially point-of-view immersion, both of which are, as I will argue, contextually inappropriate to the early modern era and ethically problematic. Performances that engage the Shakespearean archive instead of immersing audiences in a fiction (or, even more problematically, in a character), are contextually more appropriate to the early modern era than are those based on interactivity and immersion.

Further, and more generally, Chapter 1 delves into some significant reasons why humanism is not unproblematic for the humanities. Lev Manovich and Alan Liu, for instance, have pointed out that new media’s interactive functions do not imply freedom of choice, exploration, or interpretation, but instead furtively reassert consumerist values. Immersion in another’s point of view, seen by many advocates of virtual reality as a powerful learning tool, invites perhaps too many uncomfortable occupation metaphors for uncritical educational use; besides, as Hayles has suggested, new media should invite



a *rethinking* of the concept of point-of-view, not serve to bolster already-in-place ideas about immersion in a fiction.

The final section of Chapter 1 uses the example of a recent performance of *Hamlet* that was more a performance about *Hamlet(s)* than a straightforward staging of Shakespeare's play in order to develop suggestions for employing new media to create "archival," citational performances of Shakespeare's dramas. These performances would "work," I will argue, because they are in keeping with early modern theatrical practices and with the Brechtian project of citational metatheatrics, which Brecht based on not only contemporary East Asian but also Jacobean theater. Archival performances would allow audience members to critically consider the actions onstage rather than immerse themselves in plot and character.

However, Brechtian metatheatrics does not account for every possibility for anti-illusionism in the early modern English theater. For me (if the humanistic expression may be excused), one of the most interesting and perhaps unexpected results of experimenting with posthumanism in the field of early modern English drama has been the exposure of additional anti-illusionisms operating on the stage at the time. Chapters 2 and 3 develop and discuss non-Brechtian anti-illusionisms that do not always rely on metatheatrics or, in some cases, on metamediation in general; though they sometimes offer strong critiques of power, one example of which will be discussed in Chapter 2, the goal of these anti-illusionist practices is not necessarily always proto-postmodernist ideological critique.

Chapter 2 posits that dramatic blank verse in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England was a new medium that, for the most part, followed the "naturalization narratives" that would be outlined by new media theorists such as Marshall McLuhan,

Friedrich Kittler, and Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin centuries later. Within an approximately forty-year time period, from the performance and publication of Sackville and Norton's *Gorboduc* (1561), the first English blank verse drama, to Shakespeare's synonymizing "blank verse" with "plain, natural speech" in the first years of the seventeenth century, blank verse shifts from a noticeably hypermediative medium associated with political drama and ideological critique to a transparent window of sorts that seemed as though it had always been suited to the content behind it. Within this timeline lies Christopher Marlowe, who in his first *Tamburlaine* play (1588) was able to comment on the ways in which a tyrant can take advantage of a people's faith in fate, but without recourse to the proto-Brechtian metatheatrics that would inform his later plays. This critique was achieved, as I will explain, via hypermediative verse and not metatheatrics.

Perhaps more importantly, Chapter 2 will draw out the implications of the observation that blank verse becomes a naturalized medium yet never reaches the phase in which audiences and commentators believe that the medium is natural because their conscious processes operate exactly like it. Blank verse's particular naturalization narrative calls into question a claim that McLuhan and Kittler – and, more recently, critics concerned with early modern mediation, such as Courtney Lehmann and Tatjana Chorney – have made or implied about the naturalization of a medium: that there is purportedly a final phase in which we think like the medium and the medium thinks like us. They suggest that in the years or decades before a naturalized medium finally "ages out" of relevance, the medium purportedly *is*, or becomes, consciousness. The naturalization narrative of blank verse on the English stage, however, will serve to

deconstruct the link between a medium's perceived "naturalness" and human consciousness; it will also permit a rethinking of how power operates on and around the stage via metamediative verse.

Chapter 3 introduces what I term *signaletic* anti-illusionism, extending Hansen's concept of the sign that "is what it signifies" (Hansen 169) from architecture to the early modern English stage in order to show how anxieties about direct, acontextual signaletic forces operating from the stage informed not only anti-theatrical tracts' complaints about an environment in which sins were sins regardless of context and intention but also actors', dramatists', and managers' decisions to consciously adopt proto-Brechtian anti-illusionist practices. Although it may seem as though the "new media" aspect of this project falls away in this specifically posthumanist intervention, the argument presented in Chapter 2 in part rests on an idea that has indeed been investigated by those studying synthetic worlds: in certain environments, two actions can be essentially distinct but effectively identical.

For example, when William Prynne claims in his *Histriomastix* that a murder enacted onstage constitutes the same act as a "real" murder committed offstage, he apparently disregards contextual and ontological factors, a move that can seem unsettling or nonsensical to present-day readers. But Prynne – along with Philip Stubbes, Anthony Munday, and Stephen Gosson some fifty years prior – is not arguing that onstage and offstage acts are *essentially* identical; rather, because onstage actions did not necessarily signify or point to signifieds outside of themselves (in other words, they did not have to *mean* in any humanistic or structuralist sense in order to *work*) but often had real-world effects, they were, at least in the view of those engaged in fifty years' worth of debate

about the dangers of theater, *effectively* identical, real in terms of how they affected the audience.

When writers like Prynne claimed that context had no bearing upon the nature of sins enacted on- or and offstage, they spoke to *affective* anxieties about the nature of the theater. Unless otherwise noted, the term “affect” in the chapters that follow refers to the concept, engaged by both Massumi and Hansen and based on Deleuze and Guattari’s theories of the sign and image, of emotionlike effects that neither stem from the personal nor necessarily relate to the personal in any meaningful way. Though affects are in a sense effects, they are effects that are not necessarily linked to their causes; as Chapter 3 will demonstrate, the logic of cause and effect is complicated by early modern pro- and anti-theater tracts’ struggles to attribute effects (which are themselves related to anxieties about affective forces on stage) to their “appropriate” causes. As Massumi explains, “the strength or duration of an image’s effect is not logically connected to the content in any straightforward way” (Massumi 24). The idea that the effect/affect possesses no *a priori* connection to its cause derives from Deleuze, who writes that

Active causes are determined in the state of things, but the event itself, the affective, the effect, goes beyond its own causes, and only refers to other effects, whilst the causes for their part fall away. (*Cinema I* 106)

This unwillingness of affect to obey syllogistic laws was a source of a number of anxieties about both the early modern English stage and the early modern English body; the latter anxieties are the focus of Chapter 4.

The dramas themselves are not without such moments of affective anxiety. The character Othello, for example, is shown to be unsettled by the possibility that events can

occur prior to and without being phenomenalized; when he struggles to determine the cause of his own “trembling” and “shak[ing],” certain that “nature would not invest herself in such shadowing passion without some instruction” (4.1.38-41),<sup>vi</sup> his words indicate to Iago and the audience that he has been made to shake because Desdemona is adulterous. But Desdemona is not adulterous; this scene suggests that Othello imagines that his wife is unfaithful because he is shaking. Put another way, the shaking itself in some manner *causes* Desdemona’s guilt. It is no wonder, then, that Othello asks whether it is possible “first to be hanged, then to confess” (38-39), reversing and altering the relationship between cause and effect.

Chapter 4 is informed by such challenges to the logic of causation. Here, I examine early modern (and also posthumanistic) anxieties of sensory, corporeal, and “personal” encounter via John Webster’s *The White Devil* and Andre DuLaurens’ and Helkia Crooke’s early seventeenth-century anatomy texts. The fact that Webster’s play portrays characters who fail to encounter events – and sometimes ghosts – with their eyes, ears, and tongues relates, I will argue, to the expectation set up by anatomists that the senses must serve as messengers to a judgment-pronouncing brain.

This chapter rehearses a posthumanist reading of an early modern play partly in order to interrogate the concept of the “posthumanist reading,” a phrase which can be disconcertingly *not* posthumanist because the word “reading” suggests the presence of a subject interpreting quite subjectively through a theoretical lens. If, however, posthumanism is to play a role in the humanities, especially literary studies, the possibilities for “readings” simply cannot be dismissed. In the previous two decades, New Historicists and cultural critics have outright rejected the relativism of reader-

response as well as the universalist assumptions of New Criticism yet have also found it necessary to preserve the latter's practice of close reading in order to be able to make rigorous, evidence-based arguments; in doing so, they have taught us that practicing theory in the field of early modern drama *cannot* mean doing away with readings. It is for this reason that the final chapter not only executes a posthumanist reading itself but also critically examines posthumanist readings attempted by Hansen (Mark Danielewski's *House of Leaves*) and Hayles (cyberpunk and science fiction centered on cyborg characters) as well as the validity of the posthumanist reading in general.

As new media theory concerns itself more with affect and the ways in which cybernetics challenges humanistic thinking, it introduces possibilities for posthumanist practices within the humanities. In the chapters that follow, I hope to demonstrate that new media need not simply reintroduce or reinforce humanistic interpretation, either in the sense of reader-response criticism or the model of reading via the paradigm of "thinking X through Y lens." Additionally, this dissertation is intended to comprise a sort of "experimentation" or "invention," to borrow Massumi's terms,<sup>vii</sup> in which the project does not start out knowing exactly how it will end (Massumi 17-18), much unlike projects that offer some insight but ultimately reinforce the paradigm that they set out to evaluate. There is one conclusion, however, that I would like to offer in advance: posthumanist practices need not stand radically opposed to the humanities.

## CHAPTER 1

### ARCHIVAL PERFORMANCE: NEW MEDIA SHAKESPEARES AND EARLY MODERN METATHEATRICALS

This chapter seeks possible reasons why, when we know that digital media can do more than store and display texts and images, attempts at web-based performances of Shakespeare's plays and role-playing games derived from them have not been as successful as digital editions and archives in terms of longevity, academic response, and audience interest. More importantly, it critiques the paradigms of *interactivity* and *immersion* on which web-based performances of Shakespeare's plays are often based, paving the way for an argument that these paradigms incorporate a problematic liberal-humanist discourse that at best grants too much power to the spectator and at worst is classist and ironically supportive of pedagogical complacency. Below, I critically interrogate three claims made by digital humanists and those attempting to stage digital Shakespeares: (1) digital media invite a return to reader response theory, (2) interactivity can be promising in non-commercial arenas, specifically education, and (3) virtual-reality-style immersion serves as a useful mode of teaching and learning. By explaining the interactivity and immersion paradigms in terms of their ethical and pedagogical limits, I will demonstrate that these paradigms need not represent the only possible juncture between studies and performances of English Renaissance drama and new media theory.

In the last decade, enthusiastic software designers, educators, and theater professionals have attempted to update Shakespeare's work for a digital stage. In 1998, the VRML Dream Company presented a real-time web "broadcast" of *A Midsummer*

*Night's Dream* using digitized actors and 360-degree panoramic views intended to showcase the company's Virtual Reality Modeling Language (VRML). More recently, Indiana University's Synthetic Worlds Initiative staged *Richard III* as a Massively Multiplayer Online Game (MMOG) that doubled as a learning tool, mobilizing new media's capacity for immersing a spectator-participant in a virtual world in order to teach audiences about Shakespeare's stage and society.

Neither project lived up to its apparent promise of more effective, exciting modes of experiential learning and performance. Though the VRML Dream Company planned new, expanded shows that would permit audiences to select and adopt different characters' points of view, their *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (also called *VRML Dream*) was not "staged" again after the initial April 1998 performance, and the company's website has been inactive since mid-2000.<sup>viii</sup> Edward Castronova, the communications professor behind Indiana University's *Arden* project, admits that the *Richard III* MMOG was "rather boring" and that the project's team had "failed to design a gripping game experience" ("Two Releases" par. 2). In the April 2008 issue of *Wired*, Castronova concedes that the project, which aimed for a "realistic Wars-of-the-Roses-era economy" in spite of a somewhat limited budget and staff, may have been "overly ambitious" (Baker 80).

More successful digital Shakespeare projects, meanwhile, have tended to be those that do not attempt to perform the plays but rather archive a set of performances. *Internet Shakespeare Editions*, for instance, has functioned as a web resource and scholarly edition since 1996, offering not only full-text editions of the plays but also a database archiving records of and artifacts from medieval-to-present-day performances in thirty-



four countries. And MIT's *Hamlet on the Ramparts*, which displays texts and images related to the final two scenes of Act I of *Hamlet*, provides specific resources to students and teachers interested in exploring Hamlet's first encounter with the Ghost via older (early editions, seventeenth-century art, and nineteenth-century promptbooks) and newer (film and video) media.

The final section of this chapter suggests using new media's potential for "quoting" and archiving in order to develop performances that would in themselves be "archival." Archival performances are not performances *of* the plays per se but rather are performances *about* the plays, their histories, and their sociocultural functions. Using the Wooster Group's recent *Hamlet* as an example of non-immersive archival performance and examining several instances of apparent non-immersive performance in early modern English dramas, I will argue that because they are not immersive performances that ask the audience to suspend disbelief and participate in the action, archival performances would better align with anti-illusionism in the early modern theater, which itself engaged "archives" of historical and cultural material in order to stage non-immersive performances. Further, such performances could serve as a commentary on immersion as an historically, ethically, and pedagogically problematic mode of employing and thinking about new media in relation to Shakespeare studies.

## I.

*Hamlet: The Text Adventure*, an entirely text-based game that engages much of the Shakespearean corpus, may be one of the most off-the-wall performances of Shakespeare's work currently on the Web. The game runs on Robin Johnson's *versificator*, a software engine named for a device in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* that

produced novels, films, and newspapers without the involvement of a human author. The “human,” however, is very much involved in *Hamlet: The Text Adventure*: it is up to the player to type in commands that will send Hamlet to Claudius’ throne, Ophelia’s bedroom, and a ship that will take him to (and, as long as he is careful, back from) England. A player may test out different scenarios: (s)he can attempt to appease Othello by talking to him or infuriate him by waving Desdemona’s handkerchief in front of his face; in the theater, one of many locations in the game, (s)he can obtain a ticket that may eventually be exchanged for a more useful item, examine the mysterious stains on the chairs, or perhaps even shout out the name of a play that superstitious actors know never to mention in a theater. Because (s)he has the opportunity to test out multiple possibilities, the player may develop a sense of control over the outcome of the game.

As Janet Murray argues, text adventures and hyperfiction appeal to the need for a sense of control over outcomes by speaking to a desire to “turn a linear passive medium into an interactive one” (Murray 33). While stories about time travel have been around for generations, it is only in the twentieth century that the “parallel possibilities” story becomes – even when it takes the form of a game – a powerful non-Aristotelian presentation of a world in which the past does not fatalistically determine the present (35-38), where audiences or users might find themselves contemplating possibilities for change in their own world via decisions made in the game world.

Yet *Hamlet: The Text Adventure*, in spite of the playful temporal and spatial possibilities that it apparently opens up, only *seems* “user controlled.” The game always ends in one of three ways: either the player (1) kills Laertes and wins, (2) dies with ninety-six percent of the tasks completed because (s)he tried to kill Laertes before (s)he

killed Claudius, or (3) fails to kill either man, most likely because (s)he told Hamlet to eat the carrot or drink the whiskey. Ultimately, the game is task based: Hamlet is not allowed to kill Claudius and Laertes until he has completed every other task, which includes killing Polonius (“stab curtain”), showing his corpse to Ophelia in order to trigger her insanity, and poisoning Gertrude (“give Mom chalice”). Though the game itself re-authors *Hamlet*, changing certain plot points to better fit the text adventure genre and importing characters from at least four other Shakespearean tragedies, the game’s players are not free to manipulate the story beyond the limited available decisions that chart a path to either failure or success.

Indeed, while the player can to some degree engage in what Murray calls “the pleasures of navigation” (129), wandering aimlessly through the game and playing with the objects (s)he finds, the play and exploration is always limited by his or her previous decisions and what the game itself permits. If, for example, the player tells Hamlet to eat the carrot that he digs up in Elsinore’s garden (not realizing that in the text adventure genre, food and drink always have a purpose other than nourishment and should never be ingested), (s)he will have no bait with which to lead a horse across the North Sea and no horse with which to appease Richard III at Bosworth Field. The user will not only be unable to complete the game but also will not be permitted to visit, and therefore wander around, the game’s England and Scotland at all.

Murray claims that “electronic environments are not limited to the solvable maze,” offering the “tangled rhizome,” a concept that she borrows from Deleuze and Guattari, as an alternative narrative configuration (130); the maze is ultimately linear, but the rhizome does not follow the logic of “what’s next.” Murray’s use of the rhizome to

describe electronic fictions is, however, problematic in that it presents the rhizome, which Deleuze and Guattari conceive of as “reducible to neither one nor the multiple ...

[having] neither a beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and overflows” (Deleuze and Guattari 21), as an organic, if “tangled,” whole. Even so, games like *Hamlet: The Text Adventure* suggest that while “electronic environments” and performances can appear rhizomatic, or non-linear, they often turn out to be just as predetermined as Greek drama. The game’s Hamlet is “user controlled,” but the tasks that the user must complete are preprogrammed and circumscribed.

Daniel Punday has put forth an interesting argument about the appeal of computer games’ preprogrammed tasks, claiming that fatalism is precisely what makes these games attractive to players: “Essential to enjoying the play in these games,” he writes, “is knowing that eventually the game will return to a predetermined narrative teleology” (Punday 87). This predetermination, according to Punday, can be theorized in terms of Freudian melancholy, which “best describes the way that readers lose a sense of narrative progression and become subject to a textual machine” (91); the loss of control is not mourned but rather becomes and determines narrative structure. However, this is not necessarily the line of thinking followed by theorists of digital reading and writing. Some, including Murray, have sometimes overlooked tropes of preprogrammed predetermination and have insisted that the “new media” of the 1990s and 2000s brought about a return of the participatory reading subject associated with American reader-response criticism; this subject creates his or her own interactive experience with a text or performance.

For George P. Landow, hypertext's interactive nature almost always implies spectator-participant control; he holds that hypertext produces a true "writerly text" in Roland Barthes' sense of the phrase, claiming that "the multiplicity of hypertext, which appears in multiple links to individual blocks of text, calls for an active reader," one who "creates" the text for him- or herself (Landow 6). Similarly, Peter M.W. Robinson argues that textual variants made accessible to readers via digital renderings of medieval and Renaissance texts often lead to readings produced by what the reader "stitch[es] together" or even invents (Robinson 101-2). And quite significantly, the title of Robinson's essay – "Is There a Text in These Variants?" – alludes to the reader-response criticism of Stanley Fish ("Is There a Text in This Class?"), which suggested that interpretive validity was wholly a function of culture and what he terms the "interpretive community."

Claiming that "interactive fiction substantiates theories of reader response" (Costanzo 17), William Costanzo too implies that the emerging field of digital humanities necessitates a return to the American reader-response criticism of the late 1970s and early 1980s. In the same volume (*The Literary Text in the Digital Age*), Johndan Johnson-Eilola notes that electronic texts in general "can make visible the operations and effects of powerful modern theories of reading and writing ... [including] reader-response criticism" (196). Indeed, computer-based interactivity does, as these writers suggest, connect to reader-response-style interactions with the text; these interactions, however, neither exhaustively nor accurately describe what happens when a user interacts with (or "uses" a computer interface.

Three decades ago, reader-response critics such as Stanley Fish and David Bleich asserted that the text and its history were not isolated from the reader and that issues of

audience and mediation had to be considered when analyzing a work of literature. Yet reader-response criticism, much like the user control model of interactivity to which it seems to speak so well, often goes so far as to posit an always-interpreting subject who is always in control of the text. Fish, for example, at one point argues for a near-relativistic mode of subjectivity when he writes that “no reading, however outlandish it might appear, is inherently an impossible one” (Fish 347).

In purportedly “empowering” the reading subject (or member of a community of readers, in Fish’s case) by claiming that the subject is essentially responsible for creating the text, reader-response criticism conflates subjectivity and agency. This conflation is, in several senses, uncritically paradoxical; a subject can control neither the text nor what is presented on stage because the subject is by (circular) definition always subject *to*. One may be subject to the law or the subject of a kingdom or conversation, and there is no subject without a preposition to subjugate it to something else. This issue relates to more than just the general “user control” paradigm and would likely be a specific concern for twenty-first century scholars studying English Renaissance drama.

First, New Historicists and cultural materialists in the field have already offered forceful and convincing arguments against the reader-response view of subjectivity-as-agency. Subjectivity, or the state of perceiving oneself as an “I” and exercising this perception upon objects, was for early New Historicists (especially Stephen Greenblatt) more a matter of willful submission than one of uncomplicated agency. According to Catherine Belsey, reader-response criticism simply cannot be an effective way of describing reading, writing, and spectatorship in early modern England – or, for that matter, in any other time or place – because it “excludes dissent, since to disagree is to

align oneself with another community” (*Culture and the Real* 15). In other words, because dissent is already inscribed in the critical practice, there is no way to account for or describe genuine rebellion. Without a scheme for describing dissent as rebellion, it would be difficult if not impossible for critics to depict those moments of ideological critique that are often central to many early modern English dramatists’ works.

The reader-response model is also *contextually* inaccurate when applied to sixteenth-and seventeenth-century English drama. David Bleich, who criticizes Fish for never clearly defining the term “interpretive community” but, much like him, focuses on open-ended interpretation as a central goal of reading, describes two paradigms under which a reader can interpret: the subjective and the objective. Subjective reading, which is presented as favorable, involves a reader “remov[ing] contradictions from thought,” while objective reading “requires that reality exist without contradiction” (Bleich 20). If these are the only two options, then one only need imagine “removing contradictions” from commonly taught early modern plays in order to understand the limitations of Bleich’s subjective paradigm. A subjective reader of this sort might try to “remove contradictions” from the sudden, surprising resurrection at the conclusion of *The Winter’s Tale* by searching for reasons why the character Hermione might have actually been alive within the context of the play and seeking textual evidence that she had been stashed away by Paulina during the last three acts. Or, this subjective reader might try to justify Ferdinand’s “motive” in Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi* by reading for a never-overtly-stated incestuous desire between him and the Duchess.<sup>ix</sup>

These hypothetical “subjective readers” seem much more like New Critics explaining away imperfections than active readers creating texts and making meaning for

themselves. Surely, if the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth centuries were indeed periods of cultural change and instability marked by an irresolvable skepticism, where perceptions of religion, gender, medicine, vision, and even theater were quite fluid and recognized as such, it would seem that engaging a paradigm in which the subject actively works to remove contradictions from early modern English thought should be considered a rather ahistorical approach.

Michael Bristol takes the argument that “subjective” or individual reading erases the potential for describing dissent and irresolvability a step further, noting that subjective individuality is a trope that is valorized in order to *disempower* whenever populism or collectivism is perceived as a threat to already-in-place power structures (Bristol 22). Critiquing the “erotics of reading” associated with reader-response criticism and American Bardolatry, Bristol finds that the rhetoric of “freedom” and “free expressivity” in present-day individualist-humanist models of reading and spectatorship “is never linked to the idea of a social agency” (25). When agency is attributed to the individual (or, as in Fish, the individuated community of readers), it is

thus recaptured for the purposes of an inimical power structure. The literary imagination initially positioned outside routine institutional life reappears at the center. (25)

Though the allure of concepts like “individuality,” “free expression,” and perhaps even “unrestricted interpretation” is that they seem to speak to empowerment, these concepts can actually serve as underhanded means for disempowering collectives. In a sense, the paradigm of “user control” and the reader-response theory with which some critics have associated it represent an uncritical valorization of individualism that does not consider



the political implications of discouraging collectivism and encouraging each person to read or interpret for him- or herself.

Included in the notion of user control is the also-problematic concept of *interactivity*, which is often heralded as a new and exciting practice that belongs to the so-called Computer Age. Whereas the reader-response explanation of user control is about an individualism that unethically ignores that concept's political implications, interactivity often poses as collectivism (especially in the era of Web 2.0), which masks the fact that actual control often lies with a select group of programmers, or, in the case of online wiki projects, with a select group of editors. Alan Liu describes this phenomenon as "Wiki-utopianism": though wikis and other Web 2.0 projects use left-leaning language, labeling themselves as "open source" and based on "collective intelligence," they are often used to sell and collect information about users, a phenomenon that will be discussed further below. Wikis and open-source projects, Liu writes, claim to be "about democracy, except when [they are] about code-correctness or design correctness" ("Imagining" 3).

Interactivity is neither a radically new social or technological development nor another throwback to reader-response theories of text-reader interaction. As Lev Manovich has suggested, interactivity is not something that the programmer offers to the user for the user's benefit. In fact, in regards to what he labels the "human-computer interface," interactivity may simply be a "tautology" (Manovich 55), always-already inscribed in computer-based media because interface *is* interaction. Manovich also argues that there is something almost sinister at work in a paradigm of preprogrammed selection that nevertheless *feels like* genuine creation: user control and interactivity might merely

be minor (but perhaps clever) developments within a capitalist framework, where the user is led to believe that (s)he is an agent when, in actuality, a sense of agency is being sold to or used to sell to him or her as a consumer.

Though it might be a tautological feature of the human-computer interface, interactivity is easily mobilized for consumerist purposes. I typically illustrate this principle for my students via the online bookstore Amazon.com, which offers several interactive tools for creating “user generated” content, allowing users to receive “personalized” recommendations when they create lists and submit their own feedback. At the moment, “The Page I Made” suggests that I purchase Barthes’ *Mythologies* because I previously chose to purchase a collection of Walter Benjamin’s essays. Having entirely of my own volition posted a positive review of a Yiddish dictionary that I used while researching playbook fragments for an academic paper, Amazon now prods me to buy *Drek! The Real Yiddish Your Bubbe Never Taught You* whenever I log in. And somewhat alarmingly, “my” page recommends a novel published through a vanity press, a scheme/scam that itself uses the rhetoric of “freedom” (to write, of expression, from “traditional publishing”) to sell a useless product to naïve aspiring authors.

The page also suggests that I “get myself a little something” from the Wish List that I interactively created; obviously, the more content I add to the site, the more recommendations for future purchases I receive. The argument that Amazon’s interactivity functions only to sell its visitors more books, CDs, and gadgets is, of course, neither entirely new nor interesting, as we (should) know what to expect from commercial operations. But the commercial mobilization of interactivity might at least

give us pause in suggesting that the main advantages of non-commercial (specifically, educational) ventures lies with similar interactive functions.

I find it necessary to address the educational implications of the interactive – and, in the next section, the immersive – paradigm because many digital Shakespeare projects, including the *Arden* MMOG and a number of attempts to create “virtual reality” renderings of the Globe Theater (some of which will be discussed below) state goals related explicitly to teaching and learning. Yet, as a number of educators and social scientists have pointed out, the mobilization of interactivity and user control for educational purposes is seriously limited by the fact that approximately one-half of the population in the United States and two-thirds of the world’s population does not have access to those technologies that would categorize one as a “user” in the first place.

Hayles reminds readers prepared to theorize digital media that

within a global context, the experience of virtuality becomes more exotic by several orders of magnitude. It is a useful corrective to remember that 70 percent of the world’s population has never made a telephone call (Hayles 20).

And Liu, in his critique of what he calls the “non-politics of cyberlibertarianism” – a set of misdirected ethical imperatives that would eventually evolve into Web 2.0 – astutely comments that the user control paradigm hinges on ideologies specific to the (West Coast of) the United States and neglects to recognize the socioeconomic factors that play a crucial role in technological literacy (*Laws of Cool* 242), factors very much tied to social and personal economic resources.

In situations where access and literacy are somewhat less limited by socioeconomic factors – for example, on fully wired high school and college campuses – interactivity still fails provide the unencumbered agential environment that its advocates believe it promises. Educational psychologists have responded to user control’s and interactivity’s supposed promises of more effective and efficient learning with a resounding *no*: though free interaction with a digital environment may *feel good*, there is neither quantitative nor qualitative evidence that it promotes learning. To cite one study as an example, D.S. Niederhauser and his colleagues found, contrary to their initial hypothesis that hypertext would improve learning because it “requires the reader to assume responsibility for what to read and the sequence for reading it” (Niederhauser et. al. 237), that a hypertextual “compare and contrast” method was far less effective than a straightforward electronic presentation in which learners were not given choices about how to proceed. The researchers explain their findings through cognitive load theory<sup>x</sup> and also note that when left to make their own decisions, learners *chose* the less effective compare and contrast method, possibly because the novel mode of presentation was simply more attractive.

Ruth Colvin Clark and Richard Mayer, citing additional studies, advise instructional designers to restrict learners’ control over their learning environments, and warn that novice learners should be permitted no control whatsoever (Clark and Mayer 234-237). Literary pedagogy specialist Elise Earthman makes similar recommendations in an essay directed to an audience of teachers of Shakespeare and early modern English drama; her conclusions are based on her own research and the work of Louise Rosenblatt, a critic who, in the 1930s, offered teachers a reader-response model quite distinct from

Fish's and Bleich's in its suggestion that meaning-creation was part of but by no means exhaustive of reading and writing about literature. Earthman suggests that "less experienced student readers see multiple perspectives not as an enrichment but as a loss" (Earthman 278). Psychological and pedagogical research shows that despite the rhetoric of student-centeredness on which classroom practices today are often based, offering students more choice is not necessarily the best option.

In sum, the interactivity or user control model is ethically and pedagogically problematic because it assumes rather than offers universal access and supplants the notion of a genuinely collective audience with that of a subjective, individual, isolated participant without calling attention to the ways in which this isolation can serve to disempower a group. At the same time, this model co-opts the concept of collectivism for consumerist purposes and executes sometimes willful, sometimes naïve misreadings or misunderstandings of "hive mind" scenarios in which the individual might have more advantages than a pseudo-collective would. Still, the ethics of individual participation are further problematized in situations in which interactivity is recast as *immersion*, where the spectator does not necessarily "create" the action but participates in it via his or her placement "in" the action.

## II.

More than a year before the release of the first *Arden* MMOG, Edward Castronova claimed that "if you immerse people in a constructed space, they will pick things up without you telling them anything" (Bryant 4). The *Arden* project's goal seemed to be to create a game that would enable students to "forget" that they were

learning about Shakespeare's characters and early modern culture. An October 2006 writeup on *Arden* went into further detail about this immersive approach:

Eventually, you may want to leave the pub to visit the Tower of London, Westminster Abbey and even the Globe Theater. Out on the streets of the old city, other familiar characters from the bard's plays approach you. If you run into the ghost of William Hastings or Shylock, they may have something for you to do. Along the way, you become engrained in Shakespeare's world and familiar with its language and societal norms. ("Macarthur Foundation" 2).

There are in this description echoes of Catherine Belsey's recounting a visit to Llancaich Fawr, a Welsh "living history museum" in which actors play the roles of seventeenth-century residents of a manor house in order to teach and entertain present-day tourists. Belsey, critiquing both immersion in the past – which, for her, is not only undesirable and awkward but also clearly impossible – and the New Historicist assumption that texts permit, via their inherent transparency, direct access to the ideologies of previous eras (*Loss of Eden* 17), understandably finds it difficult to intellectualize from the "living history" perspective. She argues that because reading is necessarily "belated" (8), one cannot interrogate the past while participating or pretending to participate in it (3-4). From this critical perspective, then, it is possible that the first *Arden* game was not successful (as Castronova himself admitted in several interviews) in part because it did not explicitly "acknowledge our distance from the past" (*Loss of Eden* 9) or anti-illusionistically ground players in the present as they investigated a past culture.

Once again, learning and immersion may not coincide as well as some educators and software designers believe they do. Castronova suggests that the failure of the first *Arden* game has forced the team to choose one (immersion) over the other (learning) in developing a second game. *Arden II: London's Burning* will, as he writes in a blog post, be

conceived entirely as a game. In *Arden II*, we are not trying to put Shakespeare in front of anyone, nor are we seeking historical or textual accuracy in any way. We are making a game; monsters everywhere. The Bard is there, too, but this time, he is not getting in the way of the monsters. (“11/27/07” par. 5)

These goals are hardly unrealistic; consider *Hamlet: The Text Adventure*, which rather playfully and self-consciously lacks “textual accuracy” but remains both entertaining and, in a sense, quite “Shakespearean.” And Castronova seems to have successfully avoided engaging one trope associated with “immersive” performances: point-of-view occupation, one of the touchstones of virtual reality.

When the VRML Dream Company described its web-based *Midsummer Night's Dream* as “non-immersive,” the term simply meant that no mounted headset was involved in the human-computer interface. Yet the viewer was immersed, or placed “in” the action, because of the 360-degree panoramic views made possible by the Virtual Reality Modeling Language. After the initial April 1998 performance of *VRML Dream*, the company wanted to design performances that would further immerse audience members by allowing them to follow characters around the virtual environment or adopt a character's point of view.

Four years prior to the only performance of *VRML Dream*, Andrew Macrae, a former Sun Microsystems engineer, proposed a head-mounted VR Globe in which users could play different roles in Shakespeare's dramas. Amusingly, though Macrae's project never got off the ground (despite support from several respected Shakespeare scholars), a "Karaoke Shakespeare" CD-ROM (1995) would operate on a similar principle without the head-mount, offering one to three participants at a time the chance to "play" excerpts from well-known scenes and soliloquies. *Wired* gave "Karaoke Shakespeare" a glowing review, assuring potential purchasers that "no one gets bored as the speeches are much shorter than Frank Sinatra numbers" (*Wired* 3.09 [September 1995]). But in Macrae's apparently more ambitious – and more learning-centered – project, total immersion would be effective because "Virtual Reality equals theatre." In his view, the two are equivalent because both require "suspension of disbelief" (Macrae 1).

As I will explain in the next section of this chapter and consider further in subsequent chapters, early modern audience members were expected to neither willingly suspend disbelief nor unwittingly buy into an illusion. Taking this factor into account, applying the concept of suspension of disbelief to too wide a range of historical practices should be considered contextually inaccurate. Recently, however, some critics have attempted to convince readers that the possibility for point-of-view immersion in the digital environment is quite promising across the board for those reading, watching, or theorizing any fiction. For example, Marie-Laure Ryan, writing about immersion in both virtual reality and literature, finds that "the ultimate freedom in the movement of the sensors is the adaptation of a foreign identity," an idea "paralleled in fiction by the possibility of speaking about oneself in the third person, or switching between first and



third when talking about the same referent” (Ryan 119). The promise of VR, in other words, is that it allows the reader or spectator to step into and out of another’s body at will.

In spite of the association that some might perceive between subjectivity and empathy, certain New Historicists and cultural materialists have argued against uncritical views of empathic immersion. For Belsey, attempting to immerse oneself in a “foreign” or historically distant culture is practically and critically problematic. Additionally, Greenblatt has addressed some of the more serious political implications of the immersive mode within the context of early modern English drama in his discussion of “improvisation,” a form of empathy which involves “the ability to both capitalize on the unforeseen and to transform given materials into one’s own scenario” (Greenblatt 227). This improvisational empathy, he argues, is embodied in the character of Iago, who “has the role-player’s ability to imagine his nonexistence so that he can exist for a moment in another and as another” (235). Improvisation, however, is not merely an early modern device for character construction; it connects to the “Europeans’ ability again and again to insinuate themselves into the preexisting political, religious, and even psychic structures of the natives and to turn those structures to their advantages” (227). Shakespeare’s construction of Iago suggests that early modern dramatists, too, may have distrusted empathy.

Theodor Adorno took the argument against empathy much further, finding the practice overtly dangerous, and for good reason. Adorno argues that there is a slippery slope between the valorization of unencumbered immersion in another’s perspective to the reality of ignoring another’s plight while immersed in his or her

mind/body/consciousness via empathic identification. Though his main concern was specifically with immersion in “reality,” or the user who buys into the culture industry and conveniently forgets to intellectualize because (s)he is immersed in complacent consumption, his commentary on what we might today call the “power of positive thinking” (i.e. avoiding negative thoughts, influences, and events by adopting a perspective from which it would be impossible to reflect on them) serves as an alarming critique of both immersion in another’s experience and participation-as-user control.

Adorno draws a direct connection between “the model of an unhampered capacity for happiness” – and individualistic dream of a fully immersive identification without any hint of disorientation or alienation, and without the need to concern oneself genuinely with others’ well-being – and the “construction of camps of extermination in Poland that each of our own countrymen can convince himself that he cannot hear the screams of pain” (*Minima Moralia* 38:62). Immersion, especially when it constitutes complete identification with other bodies, personas, identities, and cultures, does not enable “understanding” or sympathy as some might assume it does. Instead, immersion provides the immersed individual with an unethical sense of personal relief in that it convinces him or her that (s)he is participating in the resolution of a situation even though all immersion actually does is enable the participant to shut out “screams of pain,” to only *feel* enlightened.

While I surely do not intend to suggest (as Adorno to a large degree does) an overt link between virtual reality’s immersive paradigm and the trajectory of the Holocaust, it is nevertheless important when theorizing digital environments or developing performances that involve adapting another’s point of view to remain aware

of the violence implicit in the metaphor of occupying another's body. Though violence to boundaries is surely important to critical practice (especially where a radical departure is the only possible departure), the idea of *occupying another's body* can suggest specifically oppressive forms of violence, including rape and wartime occupation. These disconcerting associations must not be brushed aside, especially when developing performances for educational purposes.

Thus far, possibilities for digital Shakespeares beyond editions and archives may seem seriously limited by the problematic paradigms around which electronic environments are often designed and theorized. Yet the success of online archives like *Internet Shakespeare Editions* and MIT's Shakespeare pages (including *Hamlet on the Ramparts*) suggest that there is more to today's new media than interactivity, immersion, and false promises of freedom-through-occupation. Below, I will consider one "archival performance" as exemplary of a way in which educators, designers, and directors might mobilize new media's archival functions for performance rather than just display; this consideration, however, first warrants an explanation of why metatheatrical or hypermediated (as opposed to immersive) stagings are more appropriate to Shakespeare and early modern drama in terms of both pedagogy and history.

### III.

Projects designed according to the immersion (or virtual reality) paradigm often rely on the assumption that suspension of disbelief is the only reliable way in which readers and spectators can engage with a fiction. Ryan, whose work examines distinctions between reader- and author-centric cybernarratives, offers a useful classification of "modes of apprehension that allow us to contemplate non-actual possible worlds" that

suggests otherwise: readers and spectators, she argues, can approach fictions both by suspending disbelief *and* by approaching the fiction from a distance, as a disbeliever of sorts. The two “modes of apprehension” are the “space travel” mode, in which “consciousness relocates itself” and the spectator does not “forget” but instead suspends disbelief, and the “telescope” mode, in which the spectator is aware, as is the case for Belsey’s reader grounded in the present, that (s)he is looking from a distance and also understands that his or her experience is assisted by a mediating tool (Ryan 115). For Ryan, these categories permit critics to explain how virtual reality, like metafiction, can “shuttle [the reader] back and forth between ontological levels” such that (s)he “comes to appreciate the layered structure of fictional communication” (126). Put another way, metamediative awareness is no less valuable to readers than is willingly suspended disbelief.

In a number of early seventeenth-century texts, we find what can be construed as strong critiques of spectatorship-via-immersion (or suspension of disbelief); by critiquing and mocking both the willing suspension of disbelief and hypothetical spectators who believe that the actions taking place onstage are somehow real, dramatists, actors, and commentators involved in the debate about the theater’s moral status suggest that early modern English spectators viewed onstage actions almost entirely “telescopically.” To suspend disbelief, or immerse oneself via Ryan’s “space travel vehicle,” would have been to participate in the type of theatrical experience that opponents of the stage had railed against for decades.

For example, William Prynne and John Rainolds opposed the English stage on the grounds that female roles were performed by men. This practice, they claimed, violated

the moral law set forth in Deuteronomy. However, both Prynne and Rainolds chose to attribute this specific prohibition from the Pentateuch to moral law rather than the “ceremonial law” (i.e. kashrut laws, the observation of Passover and the Sabbath, and other restrictions on dress detailed in the Old Testament) from which Christ “delivered” his followers (Rainolds 9-14), even though the moral law generally comprised only the Ten Commandments and laws derived from them. There thus seem to have been – as Lisa Jardine has demonstrated<sup>xi</sup> in her study of the topic – other anxieties about transvestism at work in these arguments against the English stage. These anxieties included the possibility that a male audience member, immersed not necessarily in the fiction but rather in the costuming, could be sexually attracted to an actor of the same sex. Thomas Heywood challenged and ridiculed this concern in his *Apologie for Actors* (1612), arguing that no spectator could possibly be as immersed as the anti-transvestism writers claimed they were. Audience members, Heywood suggests, were not offered the means by which to even *imagine* that male actors portraying women onstage were actually women:

But to see our youths attired in the habit of women, who knows not what their intents be? Who cannot distinguish them by their names, assuredly knowing, they are but to represent a Lady, at such a time appointed?  
(Heywood 16)

According to Heywood’s account, actors may have gone so far as to purposefully remind audiences of their names and the fact that they were playing women specifically for the stage, making it nearly impossible for audience members to willingly suspend disbelief.

The examples above and those that follow in this section are intended to foreground not only the arguments about “archival performance” with which I will conclude this chapter but also the broader arguments I make about early modern anti-illusionism(s) in Chapters 2 and 3. Though I highlight the Brechtian qualities of a recent performance and some of the proto-Brechtian qualities of early modern drama here, early modern anti-illusionism was not limited to Brechtian metatheatrics; there were also metrical and verbal (Chapter 2) as well as what I term signaletic (Chapter 3) anti-illusionisms operating on and from the stage. Those proto-Brechtian metatheatrical moments that are written into the plays, however, present and comment on suspension (whether willing or naïve) of disbelief.

Shakespeare specifically parodies the figure of the naïve spectator (i.e. one who unwittingly believes that what is happening onstage is somehow “real”) in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* – which is perhaps one reason why the creators of *VRML Dream* found the play to be appropriate for a virtual-reality-style environment – when the actors performing *Pyramus and Thisbe* add a lengthy prologue so that the “ladies” in the audience will not be frightened by the presence of an actor playing a lion (2.2.25). Hippolyta, one of the “ladies” about whom the actors were so concerned, dismisses the performance as “the silliest stuff that I have ever heard” (5.1.208). Early modern metatheatrics were not intended to reassure naïve audiences that animal attacks taking place on stage were not real; it served instead to prevent audience identification with the characters onstage and immersion in the fiction of the play.

Participation – or, as we might label it for the purposes of this discussion, a theatrical version of “user control” – was also ridiculed along with the idea of audiences

immersing themselves in a play's fictions, characters, and costuming. Nell and George, the citizens who become playwrights-for-a-small-fee in Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, are surely characterized as naïve spectators at many points in the play; they are not, however, passively immersed. Despite their insistence on taking over the city comedy *The London Merchant* and transforming it into a fantastical romance, they always remain aware that the performers are young boys (The Children of the Queen's Revels), not adult men and women (1.97, 2.287-94, 3.330-31), and that the "Knight" is actually Nell's servant, Rafe (2.304, 3.3.04-6, 5.186). What *is* mocked, though, is the couple's refusal to distinguish between fictional and presumptively real constructs, to completely understand the fiction as a fiction in "telescopic" mode. In fact, in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, it is George and Nell's commentary – in which, for instance, they side with the parents and the unfavorable suitor from *The London Merchant* plot, at one point astutely labeling the favorable suitor a "desperate villain" for testing his love interest's loyalty by threatening her life (3.94) – that might have permitted the audience to view the fiction telescopically, to recognize it as a narrative that did not operate according to the same principles that operated in their daily lives.

If early modern drama was rarely immersive (and further instances of non-immersion will be examined in the next two chapters), sometimes going so far as to impede audience immersion in the plot, belief in the actions, and identification with the characters on stage, then it seems rather incongruous that some of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century technologies that have been used to approach it can lead a spectator to assume that drama at the time required members of the audience members to identify with characters and willingly suspend disbelief. Alternatively, there may be a

more effective approach available; programmers, designers, and directors can use current technologies to bring history, cultural archives, and mediation to the forefront of performance.

#### IV.

For Brecht, “historicization,” or reminding audience members that the action taking place onstage *already happened*, was an effective way of “check[ing] ... the tendency to plunge into ... illusions” of immersion and fatalism (Brecht 136) because the audience could not passively be “carried along” by actions that did not appear to be happening in the present. If actors and writers portrayed the events that occurred onstage as “history,” Brecht argued, then audience members could contemplate possibilities for change in their own world; actions that seem to be taking place in the present tend to *feel* predetermined and suggest that the world outside the theater is also determined by fate. One way in which the early modern English theater historicized performance was by engaging archives of historical and cultural material. Shakespeare and the King’s Men staged material from Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, the *Gesta Romanorum*, Plutarch, Ovid, Chaucer, and a handful of Italian poems and novellas with which audiences would have been, to varying degrees, familiar. Though Shakespeare likely did contribute “new” elements to these texts, the trope of creative invention belongs to the Romantic era; performance in the early modern era was primary archival rather than creative, in the sense of pure invention with which we associate creativity today.<sup>xii</sup>

Recently, the Wooster Group staged a hypermediated *Hamlet* that can be described as an “archival” performance because it was not a performance of *Hamlet* so much as it was a performance about productions of *Hamlet*. In a rather Brechtian mode,



the Wooster Group extensively quoted *Hamlet(s)* and its place in the American cultural imagination via an altered full-length film, numerous film clips (sometimes presented in Windows Media Player), and often-humorous blocking that served as a commentary on typically overlooked disjunctures between film and theater.

Throughout most of the play, a 1964 performance of *Hamlet* starring Richard Burton was projected onto a screen behind the actors on stage. The film production had originally been intended to bring a “genuine” theatrical experience to moviegoers; the Wooster Group commented on the impossibility of bringing a genuine theatrical experience to moviegoers. The action onstage rather absurdly followed the film’s camera angles, with a table on wheels continually adjusted to match the camera’s movements while the actors mimicked their counterparts on screen. Their movements exposed how what would have looked “natural” (and perhaps even stagelike) on film comprised awkward and jerky movements on stage. Both film and theater were thus exposed as distinct forms of mediation, neither of which was necessarily a transparent window through which spectators could easily view actors’ movements.

Reviews of the production, which were generally positive, praised it as a technical tour-de-force but warned unsuspecting audience members that, in the words of one theater magazine, “anyone who buys a ticket expecting to see Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* is likely to be disappointed, for what you get here is the Wooster’s *Hamlet*, with the Bard’s play more or less a background device” (*CurtainUp* 1). Many reviewers also chose to focus on the way that the Wooster Group used technology to comment on the rhetoric of presence and absence so common to Lacanian theories about Shakespeare on film; Ben Brantley of the *New York Times* noted that “as the actors ... try to give flesh to the fading

phantoms behind them, the production becomes an aching tribute to the ephemerality of greatness in theater” (par. 5), and that the Wooster Group’s version of the play demonstrates that actors cannot recreate or “summon exactly the experience” of Burton on stage in 1964 (par. 6). Similarly, reviews in academic journals centered on the presence/absence binary as well: Teresa Smalec claimed that the Wooster *Hamlet* stages the “relationship between originals and their copies” and the absences at the heart of this relationship (Smalec 277), while Sarah Werner commented that the production was marked by “a crucial difference in origin,” beginning not with Shakespeare but with Burton, and that there was no way to return to or perform that origin (Werner 323). However, the mixing of media and permitting different types of media to comment on one another can generate a truly anti-immersive experience that is not merely about authenticity, preservation, or the audience’s desire for an originary source. The Wooster Group *Hamlet*, I would argue, was a mixed-media, “mixed-reality” production that extensively engaged Brechtian practices of historicization and quotation.

I borrow the term “mixed reality” from Mark B.N. Hansen, who argues that advocates of the virtual reality paradigm imagine that the whole of experience can be reconstituted on a visual register (113-125). Hansen, developing a phenomenology of touch, finds an alternative to VR in “mixed reality,” an often-disorienting mode of mediated experience that does not rely on a visual sense of immersion and reminds its spectator-participants that perception is neither centered on nor limited to the visual. “Today’s exemplary mixed-reality situations,” Hansen writes, “all have as their condition the abandonment of the dream of total immersion (i.e. the representationalist form of verisimilitude)” (8).

The possibility for “mixing” reality is not new to post-representationalist, post-VR environments. In the mid-twentieth century, Brecht, influenced by East Asian and early modern English stage practices, attempted to shift theater in a direction alternate to Aristotelian catharsis and immersive psychological realism by calling attention to theatrical conventions and mediation via both older and newer media. Describing an acting technique intended to intensify audience members’ awareness that they were watching a rehearsed event and were neither immersed in the drama nor viewing the action through a hole drilled in a fourth wall, Brecht analogizes his spectator to a driver who, “after driving a modern car for a long while,” finds him- or herself behind the wheel of “an old model T Ford.” The driver who previously took the car’s operation for granted now “hears explosions once more” and learns that “the motor works on the principle of explosion” (Brecht 144). Learning, according to Brecht, tends to occur when the audience is made aware of mediation, or the mechanisms on which the theater operates; the opening up of an alienated critical space or unbreachable divide between audience and performance via metamediation and historicization permits audience members to think about, rather than identify with, the actions onstage.

Brecht does not limit his conception of anti-immersive attention to mediation to the reintroduction of older media; he also discusses how introducing elements of “new” media to the stage can contribute to the *Verfremdungseffekt* and “the illusion of not being in a theater” (102-103). Film, as a newer medium at the time of Brecht’s writing, called into question the twentieth century assumption that psychological realist modes of spectatorship were somehow “natural”; film’s “technical advances alone,” he writes, permitted productions both on stage and screen to engage an Homeric style of oral

storytelling in which audience members would be able to understand that a story was being told to them and that they were not watching a series of events unfold before them in the present tense (70). While film could certainly be used to create a sense of realism, it was when filmmakers and theater directors used the relatively new medium of film for the purpose of generating alienation-effects rather than reality-effects that audience members might, in Brecht's view, discover that the present is alterable and determined by neither historical inevitability nor fate nor psychological character.

Film permitted Brecht to tell stories in epic form, a practice that involved not only metatheatrics but also historicization and quotation, a non-seamless bringing together of diverse sources in which the source material always remains apparent, a practice not unlike the "archival" stagings of Shakespeare's theater. In a similar manner, today's new media can lend themselves to performances of various cultural imaginings of the Shakespeare archive. Of course, in considering the Shakespeare "archive," it is important to keep in mind a caveat offered by Bristol in his discussion of the ways in which academic disciplines have been influenced by leisure-class lawyers: the trope of the "archive" should never be engaged uncritically because archives (specifically for his study, libraries) are almost always by-definition conservative. The concept of the archive can all-too-easily involve an unethical mixing of conservative and liberal politics not unlike that of Liu's cyberlibertarianism and Wiki-utopianism. We must therefore remain wary – as Hayles also asserts – of promises of "wide access to literacy" (Bristol 63).

The archives that the Wooster Group staged in their *Hamlet* were not informed by preservation but rather by the audience's affective familiarity with (altered) sounds and images from prior *Hamlets*. This was especially apparent when, during several scenes,

the screen upstage on which the 1964 film had been projected went blank (blue, actually, perhaps evoking Windows' threatening "blue screen of death") with only the word "UNRENDERED" digitally imposed on it. The first "unrendered" scene occurred where Polonius initially speaks to Ophelia about her relationship with Hamlet and warns Laertes to "neither a borrower nor a lender be" (1.3 in the ostensibly "original" play); for just a moment, the blue screen was interrupted by an interior shot of Polonius' house from Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000). The "unrendered" screen then appeared again, but the onstage Polonius now delivered the borrower/lender speech in Bill Murray's voice, mouthing the words along with the audio from Almereyda's film. Murray himself never appeared on screen, and the interior shot may have been in fact unrecognizable to those not familiar enough with the film to be able to identify it without the presence of Murray, Julia Stiles, and Liev Schreiber. It was, perhaps, not an explicit allusion to a performance or adaptation of *Hamlet* but a moment that could be experienced as an image from a *Hamlet* archive regardless of whether or not it was explicitly "recognized."

A blue screen appeared again when the onstage Player King conceded his speech to none other than Charlton Heston, whose melodramatic rendering of the Trojan War tale in Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet* (1996) seemed to carry with it its own archive of Hestonian Biblical epic. The scene from Branagh's film opened on the blue screen in Windows Media Player – perhaps a comment on the meaning of the word "player" in the digital age – as a file named "C\_Heston.mov." Here, the Wooster Group portrayed the (American?) encounter with *Hamlet* in terms of individual files stored and labeled according to cultural priority, suggesting that what is explicitly recognized or noticed is often dependent on these priorities.

While the performance quoted *Hamlet(s)* extensively, it was also a performance about the many ways in which it is possible to quote *Hamlet*. In repeatedly interrupting the audience's engagement with the plot and characters by using newer media to quote and historicize the play's content, and by exploiting the audience's memorial and affective familiarity with various *Hamlet* adaptations, the Wooster Group was able to present a non-immersive mixed-media experience that both staged and commented on the concept of the archive.

In light of the pedagogical and ethical limits of interactive/immersive "virtual reality" approaches to new media Shakespeares, I would suggest that educators and theater professionals consider employing the archival functions demonstrated by projects like *Internet Shakespeare Editions* not merely in order to store texts and images, but in order to perform Shakespeare's plays as archives. This approach makes sense in the contexts of both current work in new media theory and early modern metatheatrical practices, which were often purposefully non-immersive and sometimes relied on audience members' passing familiarity with source materials. While digital technologies, virtual reality, and even film are surely capable of immersing spectators in a performance, immersion should not be viewed as the only (or "best") approach to designing new media Shakespeare performances.

## CHAPTER 2

### “SPEAK THE SPEECH”: DRAMATIC BLANK VERSE AS A NEW MEDIUM ON THE ENGLISH STAGE

As Chapter 1 has demonstrated, new media interventions that permit audiences and readers to experience early modern texts and performances via computer-based media are quite common. In the case of some of these interventions, the computer game becomes a new performance genre that calls into question Aristotelian assumptions about the roles of fate, suspension of disbelief, and point-of-view immersion in both literature and theater, while other interventions involve digitizing texts in order to create near-Talmudic hyperlink structures or concordances with search functions that would have been unimaginable in print media. These computer games, archives, and editions give rise to interesting and relevant pedagogical debates, and can indeed consist in enjoyable modes of presentation or gameplay, but they do not exhaust the possibilities for intersections between new media theory and early modern English drama.

This chapter explores a different type of intersection between the two, considering dramatic blank verse as a “new medium” for the early modern English theater. Exploring blank verse as a form that *mediated* speeches onstage, I examine the ways in which the story of blank verse on the English stage aligns quite well with the naturalization narratives offered by media theorists such as Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, Friedrich Kittler, and Marshall McLuhan for media such as film, television, and hypertext. Despite some critics’ claims that blank verse was either always natural or was suddenly and brilliantly naturalized by Shakespeare, it actually seems to shift, during a period of approximately four decades, from an uncomfortably “unnatural,”

hypermediative form considered appropriate for political drama to a naturalized manner of speaking best suited to a comic temperament.

However, this chapter does not seek to demonstrate that there is a simple one-to-one match between aspects of historically and culturally distinct media narratives, or to end with the same construct with which it began, suggesting a “universality” of media narratives; rather, it critiques new media narratives as it engages them. New media narratives, and the label “new” in general, can be problematic in those situations where the new is uncritically valorized. When new media – including those that have made the virtual reality paradigm possible – are mobilized for consumerist purposes, they are often advertised as “exciting new technologies,” interesting because they are novel(ties), important because they belong to the future. As Alan Liu has recently cautioned, the phrase “new media” is in itself problematic because it “stages an exaggerated encounter between *old* and *new*.” When analyses of new media concern themselves only with the differences between the new and the old, new media’s narratives become “narratives of modernization,” bringing up uneasy associations with bureaucracy, globalization, and the pseudoliberal versions of enlightenment that were referenced in the introduction to this dissertation. Liu goes on to argue that such “right angled” narratives of progress and development “typically do not survive concrete acts of narration” (“Imagining” 3-4). Yet Liu does not advocate doing away with narration altogether when theorizing new media. He offers his own new media narrative which not only refuses to determine all new media encounters but also is capable of reversing and folding back on itself. This narrative is distinguished by three central moments: “enchantment” or “colonization,” in which subjects are so much under the medium’s spell that they are *determined* by it;



“disenchantment” or “critique/resistance,” which always happens within the colonization narrative; and “media surmise,” which introduces the possibility of adopting the medium itself for the purpose of critique instead of critiquing the medium from a stance that only appears to be outside of it (4-7). If resistance always happens from within a colonization narrative, then it is always-already inscribed in our encounters with the medium and is therefore not quite as radical as it imagines itself to be. Media “surmise,” on the other hand, co-opts rather than resists the medium (in this case, narrative) in order to critique the medium.

Blank verse both fits with and challenges more recent new media narratives. For example, McLuhan and others have noted that early on, a new medium tends to be hypermediative, capable of constantly calling attention to its status as a mediating device, and in some cases, strongly political, critiquing political and social ideologies circulating in the culture within which it developed. Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine*, as I will argue below, relies on these facets of the emerging medium in order to achieve ideological critique without recourse to the proto-Brechtian metatheatrics that are often assumed to represent the only possibility for metamediation in the theater.

Where new media naturalization narratives can help to explain shifts in the use of blank verse in early modern drama, so too can the story of dramatic blank verse alter the new media naturalization narrative. The final section of this chapter will address one critical difference between blank verse’s naturalization narrative and similar narratives of twentieth- and twenty-first century new media developments offered by the media theorists referenced above: though blank verse was eventually “naturalized” in that it was imagined to be transparent and speechlike, few if any early modern commentators

claimed that it resembled thought. Thus, what may be at stake in theorizing blank verse as a new medium are not only the arguments that hypermediation on stage was always a matter of proto-Brechtian metatheatrics and that Shakespeare or Marlowe naturalized blank verse (a claim that will be discussed immediately below) but also the supposed connection between natural or transparent media and consciousness. Put another way, if blank verse was a new medium that was eventually naturalized by early modern culture, then the particulars of its naturalization narrative call into question the implication or assumption that a medium must eventually resemble human consciousness in order to seem natural.

## I.

In Shakespeare's dramas, the term "blank verse" is used to indicate freely-flowing, natural-sounding speech. Hamlet, on learning of the players' arrival in Elsinore, asks that "the lady ... say her mind freely, or the blank verse shall halt for't" (2.2.323-24). *Much Ado About Nothing*'s Benedick finds it impossible to render his love for Beatrice in "festival terms" or rhyme (5.2.35-40), noting that even the names of "Troilus the first employer of panders, and a whole bookful of these quondam carpet-mongers ... yet run smoothly in the even road of a blank verse" (31-34). And in *As You Like It*, Jacques uses the term in a humorously metatheatrical sense, perhaps mocking Orlando's line of blank verse spoken in a scene that otherwise comprises prose exchanges; though Jacques calls attention to Orlando's line, the term, within the context of the scene, refers to Orlando's plain, honest speech (4.1.29-30). A carefully constructed verse form consisting of five iambic feet was considered a smooth, perhaps honest, form of speaking

of speaking despite the fact that more realistic prose speech was available to early seventeenth century dramatists.

Nineteenth century critics generally offered two explanations for why blank verse was viewed as “natural” in the early-to-mid seventeenth century: either blank verse was felicitously suited to drama because it already resembled speech, or it initially sounded constructed and clunky but was eventually transformed into a naturalistic (or instinctive) and speechlike form by none other by none other than the Bard himself. Both explanations have persisted into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and are therefore worth evaluating here.

The former explanation, the idea that blank verse was speechlike from the outset, seems to have circulated amongst editors who argued that blank verse had always been – as one editor of Marlowe’s complete works phrased it – “well-suited to natural dialogue” (Thomas viii). Robert L. Ramsay, writing in 1910, found it “perhaps a little remarkable that blank verse did not win acceptance at once as the fittest dramatic medium” (Ramsay 194) given its role in a “fundamental dramatic impulse towards realism” that would ultimately lead to Ibsen’s “taking a step towards real life” (182). Much in the same way that E.K. Chambers imagined the Renaissance stage to represent one point on a trajectory that culminated with the proscenium arch, Ramsay viewed the use of blank verse in drama as representing one point on a trajectory that culminated in the development of the realist theater.

More recently, George T. Wright, in his study of meter in Shakespeare’s plays, labeled pentameter “the most speechlike of English line lengths” because it is “by nature asymmetrical – like human speech” and blank verse “a spoken language of the stage that

combined natural phrasing and intonation with a high degree of metrical patterning” that nevertheless did not sound highly stylized (Wright 193). Even Stephen Greenblatt, whose work paved the way for many arguments about the ways in which early modern stage practices deconstructed rather than bolstered the concept of the “natural,” claimed that Marlowe’s blank verse “must have seemed, after the jog-trot fourteeners of the preceding decades, like reality itself” (Greenblatt 222). Currently, some cognitive views of poetics hold that the human brain “likes” iambics and that blank verse’s smooth, “even road” has a neurological basis, a position that critic Timothy Steele has rejected on the grounds that it is English-centric, as many languages are not fundamentally iambic in structure.

The second explanation for blank verse’s naturalization better accounts for the form’s initial reception as (in Thomas Nashe’s oft-quoted words) “bombastic” and “bragging” (Nashe 3). Here, the story typically begins with the severely end-stopped lines of Sackville and Norton’s *Gorboduc* (1561), the first English drama composed entirely in blank verse. Marlowe, whose first plays are full of “bombast” and “ranting” (Cunningham ix), later learns “to make the measure that thundered the threats of Tamburlaine falter the sobs of a broken heart” (Bullen xxv), becoming, as one late nineteenth century editor would call him, “Shakespeare’s greatest predecessor” (Bullen ix). And although Wright’s claim that blank verse had a “speechlike” quality is clearly in line with the first explanation, he is at the same time able to argue that this quality had to be “developed” somewhat (Wright Chapter 3). According to Wright’s (and others’) timeline, iambic pentameter and blank verse become more naturalistic, universal, and even human when Shakespeare successfully raises Marlowe’s “mighty line” to a new level.

While the latter explanation for blank verse's naturalization does indeed account for the form's perceived "bombast" in its early days and for Shakespearean blank verse naturalism, it seems to take for granted an assumption that good blank verse drama begins and ends with Shakespeare. Russ McDonald has convincingly argued that negative criticism of early blank verse – up to and including Marlowe's plays – is often the result of familiarity with (and implicit approval of) Shakespeare's "rhythmic diversity" (McDonald 62). In my view, the idea that Shakespeare naturalized and perfected blank verse might in some cases be the result of an unacknowledged Bardolatry: Shakespeare was an unusually naturalistic playwright for his time<sup>xiii</sup>; naturalism was valued by nineteenth-century Romantics and early-twentieth century realists and perhaps today continues to be valued despite postmodernist assertions against what Ramsay called "the fundamental dramatic impulse towards realism" (182); therefore, some are led to conclude, Shakespeare successfully brought realism to the stage via naturalism and blank verse.

The latter explanation, much like the former, also assumes that there was a "realism-impulse" in the first place. First, a philosophical critique of this assumption via Gilles Deleuze: as Deleuze noted in his analysis of cinema, naturalism does not have to suggest realism, and can, in fact, consist in a sharply different mode of acting in which there is *only* impulse (but obviously, not an "impulse towards realism" of any sort) without "behavior," without conscious processing, without humanistic psychology. Realism, on the other hand, is where "affects and impulses now only appear as embodied in behaviour, in the form of emotions or passions which order and disorder it" (*Cinema 1* 141). Realism involves affects embodied as and in emotions; naturalism's affects or

impulses are not embodied in rational or psychological emotion. If realism is in a sense embodied, emotional naturalism, then Shakespeare's status as the author of the most naturalistic early modern plays surely does not necessitate the claim that his plays were also the most realistic.

At least one early twentieth-century formalist study of sixteenth century verse drama points to the distinction between the "natural" and the "realistic." J.E. Bernard, who examined the Tudor-era interlude, a type of dinnertime folk-drama that predated Elizabethan stage plays (and stage culture), argued that interludes could not be dismissed as exercises in Skeltonic doggerel, as tetrameter couplets "eventually came to be the most legitimate medium for the interlude" (Bernard 43). Although Chaucer had begun using pentameter more than a century earlier, and although the number of syllables in a line was in many cases virtually irrelevant (2), Bernard finds "heavy rimed tetrameter" to be "the most natural metre in which those who versified [interludes] liked to write" (15). Still, Bernard does not claim that this medium, the most "natural" for the interlude genre, was in any way realistic; according to Bernard, it was "artless" (191), highly stilted and notoriously unscannable, and could not have been said to resemble "real" speech or produce realism-effects.

Further, some of the earliest critiques of English blank verse drama and poetry suggest that realism was not a major concern and that it may not have been a factor at all in the naturalization of blank verse. The medium of blank verse was not initially received as not realistic enough; rather, it was received – much in the same vein as Sir Philip Sidney's criticism of English stage plays in general in *The Apologie for Poetry* (1595) – as not *decorous* enough. For example, George Puttenham's *The Art of English Poesie*

(1589) advises that decorum is to be followed solely on the basis of theatrical convention, where “speech and stile” should match the speakers’ rank and state not in terms of how a person of a certain rank would actually behave or speak, but in terms of how a character on stage representing that person would be expected by the audience to behave or speak (Puttenham 124).

Puttenham, who believed that the goal of English verse should be musicality rather than speechlike flow,<sup>xiv</sup> was especially concerned with “figures and figurative speeches” that violated the principles of decorum. Though “ornament” is for him an important component of poetry, figures “passe the limits of common utterance and can be used to deceive the eare and also the mind, drawing it from plainnesse and simplicitie to a certain doublenesse” (128). This may on first glance seem like an argument in favor of realism, but, as Puttenham explains, figures that were used in ostensibly real-life conversation and might therefore seem realistic to audiences could be considered indecorous and inappropriate for verse, both on- and offstage. Puttenham supplies the example of “princes pelfe,” a phrase that was often used to refer to one’s own treasures and winnings but was considered “lewd” because *pelfe* denotes the “scraps and shreds of taylors and skimmers,” which should not be associated with princes. This commonly used phrase, Puttenham argues, is entirely inappropriate for prose speech.

Debates about the use of rhyme in English verse also suggest that decorum, not realism, was a central issue in early modern poetics. George Gascoigne, the author of one of the earliest English blank verse plays (*Jocasta*) and a long blank verse poem (*Steele Glas*), supports the use of rhyme but writes that “to use obscure and dark phrases in a pleasant Sonnet, is nothing delectable, so to intermingle merie iests in a serious manner is an

*indecorum*” (“Certayne Notes” 4). Where Gascoigne approves of the decorous use of rhyme, those who were critical of rhyming verse were not overtly concerned about whether such verse seemed realistic: Thomas Campion and Francis Meres opposed the use of rhyme not because of the rather obvious observation that “real” speech rarely if ever comprises end-rhymed lines, but because Latin verse did not use rhyme. Rhyme, in other words, was unnatural not because it was not realistic, but because it was not part of the Latin poetic tradition. For Campion, avoiding rhyme is an issue of nationalism: English verse, he claimed, should sound more like classical Latin and Greek and less like contemporary French, Spanish, and Italian verse (Campion 166).

Taking into account sixteenth and seventeenth century concerns about rhyme and decorum, it becomes more difficult to argue that blank verse’s initial reception as “bombastic” and unnatural resulted from a “realism impulse” that led Marlowe and Shakespeare to transform the metrical pattern into a naturalistic, realistic, and “human” form of dramatic speech. I would suggest that there is an alternate possibility that does not entirely contradict the naturalization narratives presented above: when blank verse was first incepted into English drama, it was, put simply, a *new medium*. While it surely did not engender the radical sociocultural effects that print or film did, dramatic blank verse was a component in an emerging theater culture in which plays were, for the first time, being written for stages housed in new architectural structures rather than for processions, holiday fairs, and dinner parties. In its development, blank verse followed a pattern remarkably similar to that which most new media seem to follow, at least within the cultural imagination or the theories of new media critics, shifting from uncomfortably unnatural, obviously constructed mediating tool to transparent window that seemed as



though it had always been suited to the content behind it. What distinguishes this narrative from the “always natural” and “naturalized by Shakespeare” narratives is that the shift from hypermediated to natural was not a shift from undeveloped to well-developed; every aspect of blank verse drama, in other words, did not necessarily become “better” as it was naturalized.

## II.

Because blank verse was a new medium in a theatrical culture somewhat concerned with the “natural” but relatively unconcerned with realism, Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin’s terms *immediacy* and *hypermediacy* are far more useful in the context of this discussion than are the concepts of realism and failed-realism that narratives of naturalization sometimes engage. Bolter and Grusin use immediacy and hypermediacy to describe the relationship between new media and the “natural,” defining the immediate as that which renders an interface “natural rather than arbitrary” (23). The term “immediacy” can refer to both an apparent absence of mediation or representation and the psychological “feeling” or immediate connection or interface. The hypermediate, on the other hand, continually reminds the spectator or participant that the interface is present and is not necessarily a natural extension of human sensory functions. In the posthumanist new media experience, the interface or medium, when rendered visible or palpable, acts *on* rather than as a result of the audience; it is neither an extension nor product of the senses.

What is especially relevant about Bolter and Grusin’s conception of the hypermediate is that it does not valorize the immediate and does not assume that the immersive is automatically the most natural, authentic mode of experience. According to

their model, one cannot say that the immediate is authentic (or “real”) while the hypermediate is not. They supply the example of a hypermediate rock concert in which audiences remain aware of mediation – perhaps because of electric instruments, lighting, and visible amplification equipment – and still consider their experience “authentic” (71).<sup>xv</sup> This concept, I would argue, can be easily extended to any theatrical experience that engages emotion by calling attention to its own mediation. For Brecht, metatheatrical performances that distanced audiences from reality-effects were nevertheless not characterized by an absence of emotion; in fact, as Brecht wrote in an early essay on epic theater, while “the essential point of the epic theatre is perhaps that it appeals less to the feelings than to the speaker’s reason ... at the same time it would be quite wrong to try and deny emotion to this kind of theater” (Brecht 23). Later, he would write that the anti-illusionistic theater in which the spectator is expected to think and “interpose ... judgement” rather than “fling [him or herself] into the story as if it were a river” engages emotions in different ways, for different purposes than psychological realist or cathartic performances do (201). There can be an element of immediate emotional response within a hypermediated experience.

The earliest phases of a new medium seem to be marked by hypermediacy rather than transparency. Both Brecht’s commentary on the use of film as an aid for generating alienation-effects on stage and screen and McLuhan’s analysis of television’s capability for engendering sociopolitical effects portray each medium as valuable because of its capacity for calling attention to itself; importantly, each medium was relatively new when Brecht and McLuhan wrote about them. When Brecht argued that film permitted productions on both stage and screen to engage an Homeric style of oral storytelling

rather than a psychological realist, unstylized mode of performance steeped in motivation, he saw the new medium's potential for producing alienation-effects via hypermediation. Film, a new medium when Brecht wrote "Theater for Pleasure or Theater for Instruction?" in the mid-1930s,<sup>xvi</sup> allowed audience members to focus on mediation; the medium thereby created a profound separation between medium and content that brought medium to the forefront and depsychologized content.

McLuhan, on the other hand, does not posit quite so profound an audience/performance divide. First, he values realism where Brecht does not, going so far as to attribute Pudovkin's and Eisenstein's anti-realistic techniques to a separation of sound and image associated with the Russian "backward or oral culture" (287) and calls the "realistic novel" a "complete anticipation of film form" (289). He is clearly not in favor of filmmakers' anti-illusionistic practices and supports the idea that film should be entirely realistic, taking particular issue with methods and practices that emerged from the Eastern bloc. However, McLuhan does view television as a hypermediative medium that can call various sociopolitical and cultural ideas into question. He labels television, a relatively new cultural medium at the time of his writing *Understanding Media* in the 1950s, a "cool" or low-definition, participatory medium that does not create a sharp Brechtian divide between audience and performance but serves a function similar to that which film served for Brecht because it forces audiences to ask questions about mediation when it calls attention to mediation. "TV," McLuhan writes, "brought about a questioning of all mechanical assumptions about uniformity and standardization, as of all consumer values" (221).

McLuhan's argument shows that a not-yet-naturalized medium can "[bring] about a questioning" of certain social, political, and cultural assumptions because of its still-hypermediative features; further, the ways in which the new medium hypermediates need not be intentionally metatheatrical or Brechtian. While metamediation did mean metatheatrics for a number of early modern plays, some were able to rely on a different form of metamediation: the deployment of hypermediative (and "new") blank verse.

### III.

The earliest English blank verse dramas ask interesting, though rarely radical, sociopolitical questions. Sackville and Norton's *Gorboduc* (1561) and Gascoigne and Kimmelwersh's *Jocasta* (1566), which are probably the earliest English dramas composed entirely in blank verse, are both brother-to-brother civil war tragedies from which "family" and psychological character are curiously absent. In early blank verse drama, themes of "human nature" are supplanted – especially in *Gorboduc* – by political interactions and hypermediative verse.

In Sackville and Norton's play, the titular king decides to split his kingdom between his sons Ferrex and Porrex, making an outlandish decision in a society founded on primogeniture. Though for the present-day reader, the plot will likely invite comparison to *King Lear*, *Gorboduc* focuses on neither old age nor familial relationships on their own terms; central to the first act is the bad political decision that Gorboduc makes in spite of his advisors' counsel. His (naturalistic?) instinct fails, and eventually his wife, Videna, kills Porrex so that Ferrex, her favorite son, can rule an undivided kingdom. Once again, however, the events of the play extend far beyond "family drama," as a rebellion and civil war result from Videna's actions.

Jacqueline Vanhoutte has argued that *Gorboduc* can indeed be read as a radical political commentary because it not only suggests that monarchs should take into account Parliament's advice regarding succession (Vanhoutte 227-228) but also because it presents a situation in which "the threat to England is embodied in a monstrous mother" (237), a scenario which could easily be construed as an attack on Elizabeth I. Despite these possibilities and its demonstration of how foolish kings can cause violent civil strife, the play ends on a not-quite radical note. In Act 5, Gorboduc's advisor Eubulus, who does admit that the end of the Gorboduc family resulted from a situation in which "kings will not consent / To grave advise, but follow willful will" (5.2.1751-2), also concludes that subjects are not allowed, "even in secrete thought," to rebel against the king (5.1.1389-95). Order is restored at the end of the play, when the nobility kills the rebelling citizens.

What may have prevented audiences from becoming immersed in the drama and thereby from fully "buying into" the messages about obedience proffered by Eubulus and the nobility was the play's metrical hypermediatedness: *Gorboduc*'s unrelentingly unvarying blank verse could not have sounded or appeared natural. Almost every line of Gorboduc's debate with his advisors, for example, is end-stopped on a period or comma. Videna's speeches are slightly less severely end-stopped – twenty-three of her thirty-nine lines in 1.1.21-67 terminate at the grammatical conclusion of or a logical pause in the sentence – but she several times altogether *stops* so that Ferrex may say his lines. Speakers never interject before the end of a line, even during what seem to be heated debates. They certainly never share lines of blank verse, a practice that would become common for subsequent dramatists, including Shakespeare.

Regardless of enjambment, it is difficult to read *Gorboduc* without stopping at the end of each line because of a striking dearth of syllabic variation from line to line. Of Videna's thirty-nine lines at 1.1.21-67, only two (38 and 46) fall one syllable short of ten. Another line clearly includes an eleventh syllable with a mid-line trochee (55), and one may or may not have an eleventh syllable, depending on whether the word "even" (48) is read "e'en." There are no extra syllables to be found in Videna's eighty-one-line soliloquy in 4.1, and the five lines that seem to fall one syllable short of ten can all be explained with an accented "èd."

These end-stops and generally unvarying ten-syllable lines were perhaps not only noticed on the page but also heard on the stage as well. Though Bernard believed that by the time Thomas Nashe was writing one of the last interludes in 1593, the disuse of "complicated rhyme schemes" meant that the play was now "free from the artlessness that characterized the folk drama" (Bernard 191), McDonald finds that it was specifically Marlowe's blank verse, not blank verse in general, that successfully "remov[ed] the obvious chime at the end of the line" (McDonald 64). Prior to Marlowe, then, it is possible blank verse dramas like *Gorboduc* in a sense preserved that "chime" through their metrically unvarying lines.

Five years after *Gorboduc* was staged and printed, Gascoigne translated two plays from their original Italian texts, one into English prose and the other into blank verse. The first, *Supposes*, a comedy of errors of sorts, was translated (following the Italian) into prose, while the other, *Jocasta*, a Euripidean telling of the story of the battle between Oedipus' sons, was written entirely in blank verse where the original Italian play was not. *Jocasta* is thematically not unlike *Gorboduc*; it focuses on a battle between brothers that

is presented as a civil war rather than a family struggle, and, according to Allyna E. Ward, transforms Creon into a legitimate king rather than a tyrant, a man who wants to rule well but ... is, like Sackville's *Gorboduc*, mortal and fallible" (Ward 5), in order to comment on tyranny but advocate nonviolent rebellion or a "passive resistance" of sorts (29). Tellingly, Gascoigne associates blank verse with a play in which kingship, ritual, and war take precedence over family.

Blank verse was at this point hypermediative, and early English blank verse drama relied, to some degree, on its status as a hypermediative medium in order to stage dissenting yet not-quite-radical political dramas that were somewhat but not entirely in line with the Brechtian project, in my view not exactly enough to warrant a proto-Brechtian label. Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* will mark a turn towards a more radical commentary on power. It is, however, not (yet) a turn towards Brechtian metatheatrical devices intended to force audiences to recognize purportedly "natural" impulses as theatrical. Metatheatrics were not yet necessary when language and meter were capable of generating metamediative, anti-immersive drama on their own.

#### IV.

The observation addressed in the previous chapter that early modern English plays were written and staged non- (and often anti-) immersively is hardly new. Some critics, including Graham Holderness, have argued that the physical conditions of amphitheater performance necessitated non-immersion and anti-illusionism; Holderness claims that with "rudimentary stage props" and daylight shining in, "the actors could not deny the presence of an audience" (Holderness 161). Others, including Jonathan Dollimore and G.K. Hunter, more overtly associate early modern anti-illusionism with

Brechtian modernist metatheatrics. Suggesting that Jacobean plays were far more radical than nineteenth- and twentieth-century critics had believed them to be, Dollimore finds that playwrights at the time offered, much like Brecht, critiques of political, legal, and religious ideologies so that audience members might be able to see those ideologies for what they were.

In Dollimore's view, early modern metatheatrics were not merely *proto*-Brechtian; the era's metatheatrical practices could legitimately be considered Brechtian because they influenced Brecht's theories of drama. Hunter too has argued that it would not be anachronistic to read Brecht's theories into early modern drama, noting that

it is surely significant that the modern theatrical successes of *The Jew of Malta* (first restaged 1964), *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1966), Marston's *The Malcontent*, and Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (1982) has been facilitated by finding in such plays qualities that appear also in Brechtian drama and the theater of the absurd ... the modern discovery that these are highly theatrical qualities indicates mainly a breakdown of the late Victorian valuation of psychological unity in responsible public figures, but the discovery is not simply an illusion of the modernist imagination; it picks up on elements already there. (Hunter 65)

As Dollimore concisely states, "The originality of Althusser has been overestimated" (Dollimore 19). In other words, at least some early modern English theatergoers would have been quite capable of understanding that some of what had been portrayed as "natural" within the culture had actually been naturalized by a variety of top-down and bottom-up cultural forces.



One such naturalized concept that is strongly critiqued in Marlowe's first *Tamburlaine* play is fate, and there are indeed elements of what Dollimore would call Althusserian ideological critique built into the play via its presentation of fate as a military strategy. When, for example, the unrelentingly violent conqueror Tamburlaine tells the Persians that he "hold[s] the fates bound fast in chains, / And with [his] hand turn[s] Fortune's wheel about" (1.2.17), he apparently seeks to convince Cosroe's soldiers that they might as well fight for him instead of against him because the "Persian crown" was "promised at [his] birth" (91-92). In the next act, it is again suggested that Tamburlaine takes advantage of the soldiers' faith in fate in order to convince them that their attempts to defeat him will be futile; he claims that "the fates and oracles of heaven have sworn / To royalise the deeds of Tamburlaine" (2.3.7-8). Fate is exposed here as an idea that can be easily manipulated and used in order to take advantage of those who believe in it or fear it.<sup>xvii</sup> But what is especially remarkable about the play's critique of fate is that it, unlike most Brechtian or proto-Brechtian dramas and also unlike Marlowe's later plays, generally achieves this critique without recourse to metatheatrics.

Marlowe's later plays engage a number of metatheatrical tropes. *Doctor Faustus*, for example, presents a theatricalized pageant of sins in which Wrath taunts the playgoers (5.324-26) and Envy complains about the seating arrangements (334-35). Barabas' covert scheming in *The Jew of Malta* takes place in asides that permit him to speak alternately to the characters on stage and to the audience, perhaps leading audience members to become simultaneously complicit in and critical of his plans. Even 2 *Tamburlaine* operates on a metatheatrical level of sorts, presenting itself as a ghost-less revenge tragedy that, for the most part, adheres to a well-worn son-avenges-father's-death plot; in that adherence, it

calls attention to its own “archival” theatricality, to the fact that it is a play situated within a familiar theatrical tradition. *I Tamburlaine* relies instead on metrical and verbal hypermediation, calling attention to its blank verse lines and general lack of psychological “characterization” without overly announcing its status as a work performed in the theater.

*Tamburlaine*’s verbal and metrical hypermediations will be considered in detail below; first, however, it is worth pointing out why the play’s reliance on hypermediation does not have to exclude immediacy. According to Bolter and Grusin’s new media narratives, a new medium in its early stages is capable of not only simultaneous immediacy and hypermediacy but also an *immediated hypermediation*, astonishing/shocking/terrifying audience members via the still-hypermediative medium. In order to explain how hypermediacy can itself be immediate, Bolter and Grusin turn to the (probably) apocryphal story of the audience’s reaction to the Lumière Brothers’ first film; when the filmmakers projected “The Arrival of a Train at La Cienfuegos Station” onto a screen in a basement café in 1895, audience members, as the story goes, were terrified at the sight of a train coming towards them. However, for Bolter and Grusin – and according to the examples of the earliest blank verse dramas discussed in the preceding section – a new medium often cannot help but be noticeably hypermediative when it is first introduced. It seems therefore highly unlikely that audience members at this very early stage in film production would have experienced the film as so completely realistic and completely immersive that they would have believed that they were in the path of an actual train.

By way of film theorist Tom Gunning, Bolter and Grusin are able to account for both early-stage hypermediacy and the sense of terror and confusion that the audience in the Lumière Brothers story purportedly encountered:

The film theorist Tom Gunning (1995) has questioned the story and has suggested that the audience may have been awestruck, but not so naïve to think that a train was about to burst into a basement room of the Grand Café. What astonished the audience, he thinks, was precisely the gap between what they knew to be true and what their eyes told them. They admired the capacity of the film to create so authentic an illusion in the face of what they knew to be true. (Bolter and Grusin 155)

It is worth noting that this explanation does not resort to the questions of realism and naïveté that tend to be brought up when audience responses to a new medium are considered, including questions of whether audience members reacted so strongly because they could only engage with the performance by suspending disbelief, and whether they were frightened because they did not know that they were not “really” in physical danger. The Grand Café situation exemplifies what Bolter and Grusin call hypermediacy within immediacy, where audiences become aware of the unmediated, never-fully-representable gap between what they see and what they know (155).

In *1 Tamburlaine*, the still-hypermediative, still-non-“natural” medium of blank verse is a source of strong, in some cases highly immediate, commentaries on power. Marlowe rather paradoxically subtracts both power (with regards to how characters are supposed to relate to one another in political terms) and everything but power (because without sociopolitical character relationships and without psychological character, there

can for Marlowe *only* be power) when all of the characters speak in the same metrical and verbal patterns.

Though some characters in *Tamburlaine* occasionally speak in prose, none is denied a “mighty line” of blank verse. The virgins in (Egyptian) Damascus use the same metrical patters to plead for their lives that Tamburlaine uses to command their deaths (5.1.64-120). In the same relatively unvarying blank verse employed by Tamburlaine to win Cosroe’s men to his side, Zenocrate and Zabina each claims a direct line to her culture’s deities, each assuring the other woman that the gods have already decided that her husband will be victorious (3.3.189-200). For the most part, “character” in this drama is not demarcated via metrical patterning.

(I use “character” interchangeably with “persona” here and elsewhere; the term “character” is not intended to imply that I am reading stage personae as though they were “real,” psychologically constructed humans. See Chapter 4 for further discussion of this matter.)

Jill Levinson has noted that the “personae” in *Tamburlaine* are also not differentiable by the vocabulary that they use. Because “the personae employ the same lexicon,” she argues, “obviously Marlowe does not adjust this body of language to produce subtle characterizations” (Levinson 100). But this does not constitute monotonous repetition; for Levinson, the play is repetitive in an epic sense, such that Marlowe goes so far as to avoid representation of “human nature” and psychological difference altogether. The epic mode, in other words, is about storytelling, not nature as it relates to human psychology. In Levinson’s view, Marlowe achieves this epic mode not through heavy-handed metatheatrical devices but “through a self-conscious lack of

expressions for family relationships, nature in its seasonal cycles, daily pastimes, aphoristic wisdom, humor, and sex” (112).

While this “lack” can surely be attributed to the “fond and frivolous gestures” omitted by printer Richard Jones in 1590, the epic, estranging effects of verbal and metrical nonvariation in the play cannot be denied. In this nonvariation, Marlowe seems to, as Levinson puts it, “offer[] a rhetorical and ironic version of history rather than an experiential and philosophical commentary on human relationships” (112). Although metrically “equal,” without significant verbal and metrical distinctions among characters, relationships in *Tamburlaine* at the same time can *only* be political or informed by power. “Human” (or character-based) relationships are supplanted by the purely political and historical.

There is, however, one notable exception to *Tamburlaine*’s “blank verse for everyone” scheme. Mycetes, who at the beginning of the play admits that he does not have the capacity for “great and thundering speech” (1.1.3-4) and later cannot meet Tamburlaine’s challenge to “speak but three wise words” (2.4.25), sometimes adds or subtracts syllables and end-rhymes his lines where other characters do not. Early on, for example, he breaks from a relatively strong blank verse speech that should end on “I might command you to be slain for this!” (1.1.23) with a second-guessing “Meander, might I not?” (24). He also, much unlike Cosroe and Tamburlaine, tends to end his speeches with rhyming couplets, rhyming even as he “commands” his men to fight Tamburlaine, ending lines with “away/today” (1.1.67-68) and “below/show” (79-80). When he senses that he has been betrayed by Cosroe, Mycetes end-rhymes “stock” with “mock” (104-105) and again turns to his advisor, saying (in a somewhat weak line of

iambic pentameter), “Meander, come, I am abused, Meander” (106). Finally, after Cosroe has become king, Mycetes announces to Meander, who himself does not speak in rhyme, that he will kill both Cosroe and Tamburlaine, ending this speech on an ABAB rhyme (“doors/head/sword/said” [2.2.10-13]).

Because every character speaks in the same blank verse pattern, social standing does not affect speech. However, the one exception happens to be the only man who is, ironically but appropriately, a king by birth. Positionality, or the idea of social and character-based positions established in a sense prior to Act I, is (perhaps also ironically) not a factor in this drama of wars and emperors. Tamburlaine’s story, which purportedly comprises his transition from shepherd to emperor via his defeat of local monarchs, does not dramatize a change in positions; the audience never sees Tamburlaine-as-shepherd. Once again, when Marlowe subtracts positionality, there is only power.

I use the term “subtract” here in reference to Deleuze’s essay on Carmelo Bene’s *Richard III*, which critiques productions that attempt to comment on power by exerting theatrical power on an audience. The essay takes issue, in other words, with Brechtian metatheatrics. Indeed, Brechtian metatheatrics cannot exhaustively describe anti-illusionism in the theatrical environment, especially in regards to the early modern era; this idea comes into play in both this intervention, which shows how the early modern theatre engaged metrically metamediative anti-illusionisms, and the central intervention that takes place in Chapter 3, which describes signalethic anti-illusionism, still another alternative to Brechtian practices. For Deleuze, playing or experimenting with power via subtracting codifications (or, the “text”) so that characterization and conflict are not

presented as encoded dramatic tropes prevents the drama from merely reasserting the power structures that it set out to critique.

In his essay on Bene's production, Deleuze suggests subtracting beginnings and endings because these favor "History"-with-a-capital-H and positionality over becomings, potential, and actualizations. In this vein, had Marlowe initially presented Tamburlaine as a shepherd – for our purposes here, specifically as a shepherd whose speech patterns were markedly different from the "mighty lines" assigned to kings-by-birth – the drama would have been *about* a shepherd's rise to power and Tamburlaine would have, at least for the audience, remained a shepherd (i.e. "the shepherd who became an emperor").

Marlowe's project, of course, cannot exactly be described as "Deleuzian" because while positionality is subtracted in *Tamburlaine*, (all) power is not. Tamburlaine is a powerful conqueror and is capable of exerting power as a theatrical figure as well, but this power has little if anything to do with his social position. In subtracting specifically positional power, however, *Tamburlaine* leaves only political power. Deducting positionality and character via vocabulary and metrics in a still-hypermediative medium, Marlowe subtracts positional "difference," rendering power effectively immediate and affectively actualized.

## V.

By the mid-seventeenth century, blank verse had "aged" considerably and was no longer a new dramatic medium. It was by this point so much associated with the stage that Milton, in his "Note on the Verse" to *Paradise Lost*, seems to "forget" that the origins of English blank verse were not dramatic. Conveniently glossing over Surrey's

and Gascoigne's century-old poems, Milton labels his own work "esteem'd an example set, the first in English" of nondramatic blank verse" (Milton 352).

Dramatic blank verse seems to begin to become naturalized, both in terms of how it belongs "naturally" to the stage and how it is for audiences a natural form of speaking, at the turn of the seventeenth century. At this point, some commentators still find blank verse to be "bombastic" and unnatural; for instance, in his anti-singing, dancing, playing, and poetry-writing tract *Vertues common-wealth* (1603), Henry Crosse, echoing Nashe's and Greene's earlier assessments but misunderstanding the form somewhat, complains that on the English stage, "hee that can but bombast out a blancke verse, and make bothe the ends iumpe together in a ryme, is forthwith a poet laureate" (Crosse 56). Meanwhile, others were beginning to view blank verse as a naturalistic medium appropriate to comedy. In 1602, Thomas Campion – one of the poets who had expressed nationalistic concerns about rhyming verse – argued that if blank verse could be "made a little more licentiate" so that it sounded like "common talke," it would "excellently serve for comedies" (Campion in Hardisson 268). The idea that blank verse could easily be made to sound "common" and was more appropriate to comedy than to politically charged tragedies or histories marks a significant departure from Nashe, who not only viewed blank verse as bombastic but also labeled dramatists who used it "alcumists of eloquence" offering no more than "a servile imitation of vainglorious tragedians" (Nashe 3) and Gascoigne, who, in his translations of the Italian plays *Supposes* and *Jocasta*, associated comedy with prose and tragedy with blank verse.

At this stage in a "typical" media-naturalization narrative – the stage at which the medium is imagined to be naturally suited to a form or genre – commentators on the



medium often begin to argue that we (or, audiences) *think like* the medium. In the mid-1980s, for example, Friedrich Kittler claimed that humans had always thought cinematically and that the specific trope of “film projection as internal theater exists two years prior to its introduction” (Kittler 159). For Kittler, film is not only more “real” than writing but is also “more real than reality” (145). Recently, Courtney Lehmann has contrasted film and theater productions of *Henry V* in order to argue that film’s capacity for Brechtian depsychologization may be limited by its status as a “relatively naturalistic medium” (Lehmann 197-98); she claims that in the theater productions, “alienation effects can serve as a distancing mechanism between actor and role” (197), while it is considerably difficult for film productions to escape what she believes is the medium’s inherent naturalism. In putting forth this argument, Lehmann clearly overlooks the fact that Brecht wrote about film-as-alienating technology when film was still new and not yet naturalized. Moreover, she assumes that naturalism is film’s essential mode even as she explores the relationship between film technology and heavily mediated memories in productions of Shakespeare’s plays.

Lehmann goes so far as to connect film’s supposed naturalism with the ways in which auteurs can exert psychological control over their audiences’ thoughts, a phenomenon that she terms the “psychology of power.” This “psychology of power,” according to Lehmann, belongs (much unlike what we see in Deleuze’s conception of Brecht’s theories of theatrical power) to naturalistic film as opposed to the Brechtian metatheatrical stage. Specifically, she writes that “the psychology of power that the postmodern auteur exploits lies in an ability to engineer and control the way an audience receives a film, regardless of the message the film product actually delivers” (198);

Lehmann thus reads film as a medium that easily links to and, in its more consumerist and commercial forms, even parasitizes consciousness.

The (somewhat backhandedly determinist) idea of technology-as-consciousness, or full, “natural” psychological identification with the medium has also been adopted for theorizing digital media, which are themselves rapidly becoming naturalized. Tatjana Chorney argues that early modern readers read hypertextually hundreds of years before the term “hypertext” was coined, suggesting that hypertext can serve as a highly accurate model of the way that cognition works for readers. While connectionism, a theory of cognitive psychology that holds that the brain operates almost *exactly* like a computer, has fallen out of favor with educational psychologists in recent years, those working with the competing “symbolic” approach to cognition have designed cognitive architectures such as ACT-R (Adaptive Control of Thought-Rational” that read like “programming language[s].” These architectures rely on the notion that computer programming languages and computer operations allow psychologists to accurately model cognitive processes, a notion which is, according to recent empirical research in the field, not a figment of a technologically determinist imagination.<sup>xviii</sup> The medium has not changed the way that humans who encounter it think; rather, the humans who encounter it are beginning to believe (and are even able to put forth well-thought-out arguments) that the medium accurately describes the way that humans have always thought.

Brecht conceived of film as a highly visible, palpable mediating technology that could easily serve to produce alienation-effects; more than two decades later, McLuhan contrasted television’s potential for sociopolitical critique with film’s inherent naturalism (a naturalism that he believed that Soviet filmmakers ignored); finally, Kittler and

Lehmann both conflate film's status as "natural" with its supposed capacity to serve as a model for how thought, cognition, and consciousness operate. Early modern English blank verse, however, does not seem to reach this final stage common to a number of new media narratives. In 1668, John Dryden, responding to Sir Robert Howard's claim that verse is too "improbable" (*Four Plays* 6) for drama,<sup>xix</sup> acknowledged that "no man ever spoke any kind of verse *extempore*" (Dryden 54), but, like many of his contemporaries and predecessors, explained away the realism factor, claiming that there was no reason that verse should sound "real." He also argues that blank verse is more appropriate to comedy than tragedy because tragedy requires "heroic rhyme," another obvious departure from the Marlovian association of blank verse with tragedy.

Significantly, Dryden is one of few if any mid-seventeenth-century critics to comment on the relationship between blank verse's perceived status as "natural" and human thought processes. First, like his predecessors, he addresses decorum, claiming that rhyme is intended to represent thought, not speech, and that heroic rhyme is best, though not the most natural, way to represent the thoughts of a noble person; while a noble protagonist offstage would not actually speak in rhyme, it is the most appropriate, perhaps most decorous, form of onstage representation of such persons. Blank verse, on the other hand, is appropriate to comedy because it *sounds* like natural, comical speech (54-56). For Dryden, comedies, unlike tragedies, require the representation of speech, not thought, and blank verse is the best medium for "naturally" representing speech.

Whereas Dryden associates the naturalistic medium with speech and the less-naturalistic medium (rhyming verse) with the representation of thought, Kittler and McLuhan (for whom the "final phase" of development is "the technological simulation of

consciousness” [McLuhan 3], a practice that would be, in Katherine Hayles’ view, a starting point for posthumanism) always associate the naturalistic medium with thought, valuing a naturalization so total that the medium becomes consciousness; we think like it and it thinks like us. Dryden, one of few to broach the subject of the relationship between “natural” blank verse and consciousness, reaches neither biological (the medium works because it just happens to match pre-existing thought patterns) nor technological determinist conclusions; the naturalization of blank verse happens for him only in terms of speech, not thought.

The story of dramatic blank verse’s naturalization aligns to a large degree with naturalization narratives for later-arriving media, including film and digital technologies. Even the early English novel, which seems to have become naturalized so quickly that we see metanovels commenting on ethical and psychological problems with naturalization and uncritical audience reception within a half-century of its inception into English culture,<sup>xx</sup> was received as unnatural at first but was soon viewed as a natural way of telling a story and later became linked with character-based point-of-view and human consciousness. These naturalization narratives, in which a medium starts out as uncomfortably unnatural but well-suited to political and power-based commentary, suggest that Shakespeare did not consciously set out to naturalize blank verse, and that the smooth, “even road” of his characters’ speech was not necessarily “better” than (or even comparable to) prior metamediative, strongly political dramas. But it is blank verse’s small but definitive departure from the naturalization narrative – its association with natural *speech* rather than *thought* – that stands as a useful counterexample to the assumption that there is necessarily a perceived or deterministic relationship between the

operations of a naturalized medium and the operations of human consciousness. A medium can be considered natural without comparison to or equation with consciousness.

## CHAPTER 3

### SIGNALETIC FORCES: SINS, SIGNS, AND CONTEXT

Although various versions of metamediation, including “archival” performance and metrical hypermediatedness, emerged from the new media interventions staged in Chapters 1 and 2, not all new media interventions in early modern drama need be entirely about metamediative operations in the theater. Recently, Henry S. Turner explored one facet of Renaissance drama from a new media-influenced, very specifically posthumanist, standpoint; Turner analogized the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century theater’s experimentations with “character” to twentieth- and twenty-first century experiments with “artificial life.” Building on Hayles’ work on character and point of view in posthumanist environments, Turner suggests that the early modern English, too, were concerned with questions of what constitutes “life,” and their anti-theater arguments “may be understood as anti-“technological” arguments” (Turner 204) because of a fear, quite common amongst Puritans, that the technology of theater rendered no distinction between “natural” and “artificial” life. Some anti-theatrical texts even went so far as to claim that a murder committed by a persona onstage was morally equivalent to a murder committed by a person offstage, rendering little difference between person (or, human) and persona (character). But because of the plausibility of artificial life in today’s technological environments, Turner claims, present-day critics may have to genuinely consider some of the seemingly nonsensical questions about the contextual differences between onstage and offstage sins that anti-theatricalists such as Stephen Gosson and William Prynne put forth (204-205).

Although Turner's essay focuses specifically on the ways in which post-cybernetic new media (theory) intervenes in the early modern theater's concept of character, I would argue that additional new media/posthumanist interventions can be staged with regards to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century anti-theatrical tracts, which not only conflated "artificial" and "natural" life but also, especially in their discussion of sins enacted onstage, conflated signs or acts with their operations. Their concern, in other words, was that theatrical signs did not merely represent acts; they constituted acts in themselves. Prynne's claim that there is no distinction between onstage and offstage murders, as I will explain below, seems much less ridiculous and much more theoretically necessary when considered in the context of ethical questions that arise in the twenty-first century regarding actions performed in "virtual worlds" such as *Second Life* and also in the context of posthumanist views of the signaletic.

This chapter extends Mark B.N. Hansen's concept of the sign "constrained by the fact that it is what it signifies" (Hansen 192) to the early seventeenth-century theater in order to elucidate what I term *signaletic* (as opposed to intentionally metamediative) anti-illusionism. This signaletic anti-illusionism relates to the idea – and, more often than not, the fear – that theatrical signs are not limited by their signifying or representational functions and can therefore act or operate directly on audience members, often in the same way that they would operate offstage. For those who fiercely opposed the theater, enacting a sin or crime onstage could engender the same effects that committing that sin or crime offstage would.

Hansen describes the sign that "is what it signifies" as "vocationally specific" to architecture; however, Deleuze and Guattari's theories of the sign and image, which have

been in the last decade co-opted and rethought by posthumanist new media theorists like Hansen, Hayles, and Massumi, as well as previous work by performance theorists on the operations of the theatrical sign, suggest that extending Hansen's concept from the architectural to the theatrical sign is neither unheard of nor unprecedented.

Though the arguments about signaletic anti-illusionism presented here do indeed emerge from the posthumanist and anti-representationalist notion of signs that are not necessarily encoded (and therefore do not necessitate the involvement of rational human decoders), they are warranted by a specific set of anxieties found in the anti-theatrical tracts of Stephen Gosson, Philip Stubbes, Anthony Munday, and later, William Prynne, as well as in Thomas Lodge's and Thomas Heywood's defenses of the English stage. These tracts, like many others from the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth century, are concerned – or perhaps obsessed – with questions of transvestism, prostitution, and the professionalization of actors; still, the attacks on and defenses of the stage referenced here also strongly imply a general wariness of an environment (the theater) in which signs acted directly on those who heard or viewed them, where an action – whether a royal procession, a profession of romantic love and sexual attraction to one's own sibling, or an invocation of the devil – could have the same effects, and were in effect the same actions, when performed both within and without the theatrical context.

The first half of this chapter develops the concept of *effectively identical* actions which, though *essentially* distinct (i.e. one can easily point to ontological differences between onstage and offstage murders), posed a threat for writers like Gosson and Prynne because they could have the same effects on audiences and actors as the ostensibly “real” actions would have on those performing or witnessing them. The chapter's second half



then goes on to connect this signaletic anti-illusionism to metamediative, particularly proto-Brechtian, anti-illusionisms, theorizing the ways in which anti-representationalist and sometimes proto-posthumanist signaletic anxieties appear to have informed actors', managers' and writers' decisions to consciously adopt proto-Brechtian metatheatrical practices. Indeed, when some detractors from and supporters of the English stage argued that theatrical didacticism (an idea strongly bolstered by Brecht) was the most effective way, aside from closing the theaters, to protect audiences from the dangers of signaletic anti-illusionism, they imagined an obsessive-compulsive theater which could avert punishment, disaster, and immorality only by giving meaning to and passing judgment on arepresentational signs and signaletic forces.

This model, though somewhat circular in that it suggests that early moderns engaged one form of anti-illusionism in order to combat the anxieties generated by another form of anti-illusionism, is nevertheless useful (as I hope to demonstrate below) because it does not limit the purposes of early modern metatheatrics to proto-postmodern ideological critique. Instead, it excises theatrical forces from solely human (writers, actors, audiences) origins, attributing them to and theorizing them via the signaletic.

## I.

Before delving into early modern debates about the theater, I will first briefly introduce and develop the idea of "acts" or theatrical signs that are neither determined nor differentiated by context, or a non-Aristotelian version of a theater in which action precedes but does not necessarily develop character, via Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling*. In this play, character is not set in place prior to Act I; when character is

“developed,” it derives almost entirely – and, perhaps for some, unreasonably or unfairly – from characters’ particular (mis)deeds.

When Beatrice-Joanna tries to defend herself against DeFlores’ accusation that she, like him, is a murderer, he cruelly-yet-accurately reminds her that she is “the deed’s creature” and “what the act has made [her]” (3.4.132-140). Her “acts” have not only literally but also figuratively made her one with DeFlores: as soon as she acts, as soon as she orders one murder and then talks Diaphanta into performing the bed-trick that will lead to a second murder (Diaphanta’s own), Beatrice-Joanna is, in Alsemero’s words, a “cruel murd’ress” (5.3.62). As Alsemero – who is himself not entirely innocent, given that he initially offered to kill Piracquo – informs her, she did not have to order the murder and get blood on her hands.

Beatrice-Joanna’s guilt is surely problematized by the play’s suggestion that she was not aware that DeFlores wanted sex, not money, in exchange for Piracquo’s murder.<sup>xxi</sup> Yet, as a character, her persona is restricted to precisely what she acts, not what she thinks and not what the audience or other characters are expected to think of her: she is a murderer when she arranges murders and even a virgin (of sorts) when she engages manipulative tactics in order to “pass” the virginity test that Alsemero administers to her. After she observes the virginal Diaphanta “uncontrollably gape, then fall into a sudden sneezing, last into a violent laughing” (4.1.50-55) when she drinks the contents of the vial that Alsemero will use for the test, Beatrice-Joanna is able to perform identical actions in order to deceive her husband.

Such virginity tests were actually quite common in early modern medical literature.<sup>xxii</sup> Their circulation in medical texts and in the theater suggests that one could

evaluate another's status based not on what was in the mind or in the body, but rather by what was *on* the body, by physical, external signs that did not require careful study of internal factors. Beatrice-Joanna, much like Antonio in the play's madhouse plot, is shown to rely on external signs in order to deceptively convince others that her condition is genuine. Here, too, Beatrice-Joanna is, for all intents and purposes, what she acts.

Though the notion of "you are what you act" can be considered in some respects Aristotelian (especially in the sense that for Aristotle, actions formed character), it for the most part runs counter to the idea that "character" is everything, that psychological versions of character will always permit the audience to distinguish moral from immoral actions. Middleton and Rowley suggest, in other words, that Beatrice-Joanna's actions cannot be excused simply because of "who she is." In this respect, *The Changeling* can surely be thought along the lines of the proto-Brechtian aesthetic that purportedly provided early modern dramatists with a crucial means for critiquing the political and religious ideologies circulating within their culture. Audiences might, for example, be forced to condemn Beatrice-Joanna for the same crime that DeFlores commits despite her higher social standing and presumed status as an "innocent" persona and thus begin to question how they judge "character" in general.

Yet while many Elizabethan and Jacobean plays – *The Changeling*, of course, included – can be said, as Dollimore and others have suggested, to have packed important ideology-critiquing punches, I would argue that early modern anti-illusionism was informed by more than just a proto-postmodern demand for critiques of state power, the church, and discourses of human nature. If anti-illusionism on the early modern stage were only about ideological critique, after all, Puritans like William Prynne might not

have been quite opposed to acting, the Deutoronomic laws prohibiting it notwithstanding. Despite the present-day connotations of the term “Puritan,” Puritans in the seventeenth century were themselves often radical critiquers of ideology; Prynne lost his ears not because of the *Histrionmastix*’s anti-theater stance but because of its suggestion that non-Parliamentary figures, particularly King James and Queen Anne, asserted their power through “acting.” Clearly, seventeenth-century Puritans would likely not have found the proto-Brechtian aspects of the early modern theater threatening enough to warrant hundreds of pages’ worth of explication of anti-illusionist anxieties.

In his *Histrionmastix*, Prynne concerns himself with an anxiety that is far more Biblical than Brechtian. He argues that because the Bible unequivocally “prohibit[s] the personating of any sinne,” theatrical signs, which often involved the performance or “personating” of sins, constitute clear violations of Scripture (Prynne 88). When Jove is referenced in a stage play, for instance, the actor referencing him has violated the commandment “not to make mention of any other gods,” even though he is only “personating” a Roman (77-78), and intends to play a role, not commit a sin. For Prynne, a deadly sin performed onstage is identical to a deadly sin performed offstage.

Prynne’s arguments were not new. Half a century prior to the printing of the *Histrionmastix*, Anthony Munday made a similar claim regarding the naming of gods on stage (Munday 80-82). In 1583, Philip Stubbes argued that even the naming of the Christian God onstage was problematic because angels and devils will always “tremble and quake at the naming of God,” regardless of the context in which that naming takes place (Stubbes 161). Much like Prynne, Stubbes saw no reason to take context into account when condemning stage plays, asking, “Who will call him a wise man that

plaieth the part of a fool and a vice? Who can call him a Christian who plaieth the part of a devil?" (167). For Stubbes, the man who plays a fool *is* a fool.

Prynne, however, would take the claim that those who play fools in the theater effectively *are* fools much further, going so far to argue that on careful consideration of the acts taking place on stage, one

must needs deeme all Stage-players children, fooles, or Bedlams, since they act such parts; such pranks, yea, use such gestures, speeches, raiment, compliments, and behaviours in jest, which none but children, fools, or mad men, doe act, or use in earnest. There is no difference at all between a fool, a fantastique, a Bedlam, a Whore, a Pander, a Cheater, a Tyrant, a Drunkard, a Murtherer, a Devill on the Stage (for his part is oftentimes acted) and those who are in truth, but that the former are far worse.

(Prynne 176)

Though he writes that acting is "far worse," Prynne is not making a comparison here; the staged act cannot necessarily be said to be *as* deplorable *as* the ostensibly real act because his argument is based on straightforward equivalences. The staged act, in Prynne's view, simply constitutes the *same* act that its offstage counterpart does.

As Jonas Barish has observed in his study of thousands of years' worth of concerns about and anger towards the theater, early modern anti-theatrical tracts' apparent disregard of contextual and ontological factors might seem somewhat unsettling, or even nonsensical, to present-day readers (Barish 118). What is especially perplexing in Prynne's work is the claim that "there is no difference" between onstage and offstage *murders*, and, by extension, onstage and offstage enactments of murder. A murder

enacted onstage, after all, cannot be said to be equivalent to a murder taking place offstage, because the murderer's actions onstage do not result in the material death of a physical body.<sup>xxiii</sup>

However, Prynne does eventually qualify and clarify his position somewhat, noting that his concern is with the very real "effects" that onstage actions can have on audiences. "Mad and beastly actions" performed onstage, he writes, can lead to "actuall adultery, whoredome, and uncleanness" in the daily lives of audience members and, on a national level, to political downfalls (376).<sup>xxiv</sup> More alarmingly for Prynne, onstage sins not only effect offstage sins but also generate the same effects, the worst of which is damnation, that offstage sins do; because God and the devil do not distinguish between onstage and offstage sins, an actor who performs actions that would lead to damnation will inevitably be damned. The anxieties that inform the *Histriomastix* relate not so much to questions or confused conflations of the "real" and "unreal" as they relate to the effective and affective realities of the direct theatrical sign.

Barish's study of anti-theatrical tracts offers additional insight into the ways in which an act performed on stage might be considered in a (non-ontological) sense identical to an action performed offstage. According to Barish, theater and performance were not always associated with fictions or even with signification processes per se; the term "theatrical" did not connote "irrelevantly histrionic" or "stagy" performance until the early eighteenth century. Seventeenth century philosopher Thomas Hobbes' definition of a person proves useful in this context for understanding the (in)distinction between "real" and feigned actions prior to that point:

A person ... is he, whose words or actions are considered, either as his own, or as representing the words and actions of another man ... whether truly or by fiction. When they are considered his own, then he is called a *natural person*: and when they are considered as representing the words and actions of another, then he is a *feigned* or *artificial* person. (Hobbes 105 in Barish 155).

Though Hobbes seems more concerned with representation than Prynne is, it is worth noting that both forms of “personhood” here involve acting, and the actions performed by a “natural” and “artificial” person are the same. These actions are differentiated only on the basis of whether or not they are “owned” by the person performing them; for Hobbes, *all* actions are performed, and the question of natural versus artificial is thus not a question of whether or not an action was performed.

What Prynne’s concerns about sins enacted onstage boil down to here is the frightening (at least for Puritans) possibility that signs could act regardless of context. It is for this reason that I have appropriated Hansen’s version of the architectural sign for the early modern theater; acts of performance did not signify what they were so much as they were what they signified. Indeed, anxieties about the asignifying aspects of signs were not unheard of in the English Renaissance, when many commentators approached the Eucharist and the practice of ingestion in general with some trepidation because they involved literally taking signs into the body.<sup>xxv</sup> Further, extending Hansen’s concept of the architectural sign to the theater is neither entirely uncalled for nor unprecedented within theater and performance studies: Bert O. States, for one, has suggested that theatrical signs operate not by signifying from a distance, but by acting directly upon

spectators. In States' view, "the power of the sign ... is not necessarily exhausted by its illusionary or its referential nature" (States 28). Russell West, too, notes that on the Jacobean stage, actors' experiments with costumes suggested the "real (as opposed to merely symbolic) power of the acting profession" (West 141). The theatrical sign, in other words, does not function only as a referent that points to other signs and certainly does not serve merely to immerse the audience in illusions; this sign can, and often does, simply act.

It was not only the vehement opponents of the theater who claimed that sins and signs were capable of acting directly on audiences; playwright Thomas Heywood, defending the theater in his *Apologie for Actors* (1612), actually acknowledged that the actions and gestures that comprise a play are capable of acting directly on audiences and could thereby pose dangers to the English people. Indeed, as Nova Myhill has pointed out, pro- and anti-theater tracts often reference, and occasionally take the same side on, similar concepts (Myhill 291). Barish also believes that Heywood "seems as determined as the Puritans to befog the distinction between the real and the imaginary" (Barish 119). Still, Heywood warns would-be opponents of the stage against "condemn[ing] a generality for a particular misconstruction" (Heywood 22) because theatrical signs can and in most cases do have positive effects on their audiences in spite of their potential for misuse.

Responding to claims that stage plays produce either ill effects or no effects at all (and are therefore unchristian wastes of time better spent), Heywood writes that the ancient Greeks knew that "action was the nearest way to plant understanding in the hearts of the ignorant" and that in his own seventeenth-century England, plays were the most



effective form of presentation because “oratory” and “painting” did not permit the showing of “action, passion, motion, or any other gesture” (12). Onstage actions were useful in Heywood’s view for the same reason that they were sinful in Prynne’s view: they “act” or operate in the same way that they would act or operate offstage.

Heywood offers a specific example of a scenario in which a theatrical sign benefited its audience when he narrates the probably apocryphal tale of Spanish invaders who, upon hearing an alarm ring out from the Cornish coast, immediately retreat. The alarm, as it turns out, is part of an onstage battle scene, and the theatergoers had no idea that they were in potential danger. Even so, the alarm acts as any alarm would act in that situation, effectively telling the Spaniards that their surprise attack is no longer a surprise (29-30). The alarm acts without regard to its theatrical context.

Next, Heywood relates stories of theatrical “ghosts” – actors playing the roles of vengeful murder victims – that induce confessions from women in British and Dutch audiences who killed their husbands and would likely not have confessed otherwise (30-31). The ghosts in Heywood’s narrative do not induce guilt by signifying or pointing to guilt, but rather (almost illogically) lead to confessions by embodying, or perhaps being conflated with, their supposed referents, such that a “sign” of external guilt, albeit presumptively theatrical, was able to press on the guilty members of the audience, driving them towards confession.

Clearly, the possibility that causes or context did not matter when it came to the effects of theatrical signs would have been a source of anxiety and perhaps confusion for opponents of the theater. John Greene, whose *Refutation of the Apologie for Actors* (1615) strongly criticizes Heywood for misreading ancient theatrical practices and

ignoring theater's pagan origins (Greene 18-23), attempts to properly attribute the cause of the Spanish fleet's turning away from England to God, not to the stage alarm (43). Citing Biblical prohibitions against the onstage enactment of sins as well as Stubbes' numerous examples of incidents in which God punished theatergoers, Greene insists that theater cannot produce both positive and negative effects, and implies via his claims about the theater's origins as a tribute to Roman "divell-Gods" (23) and God's involvement in turning away the Spanish fleet that all effects must have a direct cause influencing them, even if that cause is explained after the fact.

Taken together, Greene's struggle to explain theatrical effects and Stubbes' and Prynne's claims that context does not matter return us to the posthumanist breaking-down of the logic of cause and effect referenced in the introduction to this dissertation. If human meaning-creation-via-consciousness, or phenomenization, is not assumed to be a necessary component of spectatorship, then signs (or gestures, or effects) are literally free to act on audience members without being tied to contextual or human causes. Stephen Gosson, who was less Puritanical than but often just as focused on the letter of Biblical law as Prynne was, was also concerned with theatrical signs' total disregard for context and the nature of causation; he defines the "lye" not as a deceitful misrepresentation but as "an act executed where it ought not" (*Playes Confuted* 43). In fact, a question that Gosson, Heywood, and Prynne all ask – but answer quite differently – is how (and whether) audiences could understand the same effects and the same signalethic forces operating within and without the theater.

## II.

Below, I will develop the argument that Brechtian metatheatrical practices were adopted in part in order to deal with the anxieties of context and causation in the early modern English theater, but there is more to consider regarding the operations of the signaletic forces just described; in order to further develop the idea of signaletic forces, it will be useful to explain what these forces were *not*. Signaletic anxieties involved neither the willing suspension of disbelief nor a spectator's unwittingly buying into an illusion. These practices, as was explained in Chapter 1, would have in most cases run counter to the aims of the early modern English theater. Though it often generated Biblically-inspired fears, the early modern theatrical sign was neither illusionary nor supernatural. The sign that informs Prynne's claim that murders onstage were equivalent to murders offstage and Heywood's story about Spanish invaders frightened into retreat by an alarm within a play does not belong to a naïve past.

This claim first warrants a brief new media intervention so that we might better understand why the arguments put forth in anti-theater tracts like Prynne's should not be viewed as an indication that audience members in seventeenth-century England naively "believed in" onstage fictions. One might consider some of the legal questions that have arisen with regards to "virtual worlds" such as *Second Life* in the last decade. Recently, a Japanese woman was jailed for "killing" the avatar of her virtual-world husband; she was, of course, not accused of murder, but was charged with "manipulating electronic data." Her actual anger over a virtual-world divorce, which she presumably understood as an event that was essentially distinct from a legal, "real-world" divorce, precipitated the virtual murder, which itself constituted a real-world crime. Though it seems that the virtual caused the actual here, it is more likely that the virtual divorce and murder simply

*constituted*, rather than caused or pointed to, actual actions. In fact, some pop-news outlets that reported the story, including *USA Today*, also cited a case in which a woman was arrested for plotting to kidnap a man with whom she had interacted on *Second Life*, offering little or no distinction between the “in-world” murder and the presumably more serious “real world” kidnapping.

A 2004 essay in the *California Law Review* suggests that although virtual worlds are in an obvious sense “unreal” because they are fictions, they are also quite “real” because “all things artificial or invented” – law included – “do not fall entirely outside the ambit of reality” (Lastowka and Hunter 7). The essay’s authors argue that principles of virtual-world law are worth developing not only because “the economic boundaries between the real and the virtual world are not as distinct as they might appear,” with real money being exchanged for virtual goods that can be used for effectively real (i.e. “dress [one’s avatar] to impress”) purposes (10), and because one cannot simply “exit” a virtual world in the same way that one can exit a room (60-61) but also because issues of virtual crime, particularly sexual assault, remain murky in these environments. Given the questions being asked about virtual worlds in the twenty-first century, Prynne’s claim that onstage murder, madness, blasphemy, prostitution, and tyranny were effectively identical to their offstage counterparts may no longer seem quite so naïve or archaic.

Because they were viewed as effectively real but did not involve “believing in” what was happening on stage, signaletic forces should not be considered in themselves supernatural. Still, they could, for the early moderns, affect not only politics, law, and bodies but also what we would now term supernatural or preternatural realms. Andrew Gurr describes a costuming decision related in Samuel Rowlands’ 1609 verse account of

a performance of *Doctor Faustus* in which the actor Edward Alleyn attempted to protect himself and the audience from the actions that he was performing. These actions could, perhaps regardless of intent, lead to an individual's damnation. Via Rowlands, Gurr reports that Alleyn wore "a surplice with a cross stitched on the front," presumably because "he was taking precautions against his own premature damnation" (Gurr 169). This decision would have indeed been a matter of belief (in hell, in the devil, etc.), but was not the result of the audience's belief that Alleyn *was* Faustus.

It would have made very little sense, especially in light of the dramas' own commentaries on and ridicule of suspension of disbelief (cf. Chapter 1), for Alleyn to believe or act as though he himself was the character whom he was "personating." The play suggests that all one needs to do to actualize a devil (as per Mephistopheles, echoing Medieval and Renaissance manuals of magic) is "rack the name of God / Abjure the Scriptures and his Savior Christ," and, to show that his soul is already in danger of damnation, "stoutly abjure the Trinity" (3.50-56); these are precisely the actions that Alleyn-as-Faustus performs. By wearing the cross, Alleyn may have been protecting himself from the possibility that when a man onstage recites words meant to summon devils, devils will be summoned, regardless of context and the speaker's intentions.

The cross on Alleyn's shirt might have at the same time served as a metatheatrical reminder of the actor's intentions and the theatrical context of performance. To those who argued against stage plays in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, fictions were not in themselves deceitful or immoral, and, provided that they were properly presented and contextualized – as may have been the case with *Doctor Faustus*' otherwise risky demon-summoning scenes – could serve didactic purposes. Stubbes, for one, rejects

English stage practices but not fiction in general when he uses fictional representations of England (“Ailgna”) and London (“Munidnol”) in order to criticize what he considers “abuses” committed in the real cit and nation, including the playhouses. His work does not call overt, or metamediative, attention to its status as fictional (except perhaps with regards to the rather obvious backward-naming trope) and reads for the most part as a dystopian travel narrative. And because he criticizes “lying” – especially the variety practiced by lawyers – at length (128-130), it seems rather unlikely that he would have conceived of his own imagined dialogue as a “lie.” Further, the narrative told by Philiponus to Spudeus might be considered effectively “true” in that it allowed Stubbes to point out abuses to the people committing them via a sometimes-exaggerated, though detailed, fictionalized description of their own behavior.

Opponents of the theater, who were not necessarily opposed to the concept of fiction in general, often argued that stage plays, unlike other fictions, comprised signs that could not successfully be contextualized. In live performance, they claimed, context could not be made to matter. Stephen Gosson admits that stage plays might be able to serve a didactic purpose of sorts, such that “every man in this playe may see his own faultes, and learne by this glasse to amende his manners” (*Schoole of Abuse* 21) because fiction *can* be employed for moral ends. However, according to Gosson, this will never happen in England, where immoral actions are staged as though they are part of harmless entertainments. Both Gosson and Stubbes claim that the English stage could serve didactic purposes if theatrical signs could be properly *contextualized* and *judged*; signaletic forces, they believed, called for a (proto-) Brechtian response that made the theatrical context unquestionably obvious to the audience.

### III.

Before I delve further into proto-Brechtian responses to signalethic anxieties, however, it will be necessary to address a factor that will likely prove problematic for this chapter's argument that proto-Brechtian metatheatrical responses might have been adopted in part as a response to proto-Deleuzian, proto-posthumanist concerns about how theatrical signs operated: in the context of theater, whether early- or postmodern, Brecht and Deleuze are remarkably incommensurable.

With Guattari, Deleuze offers an asignifying theory of language and the image that is – and has been thus far – quite useful for thinking about and describing certain non-metamediative anti-illusionisms operating in the early modern theater. Deleuze and Guattari's work questions the primacy of signification but does not altogether abandon the sign; they argue not against the signifier itself (just as I am certainly not suggesting here that *no* signification whatsoever takes place in theater performance), but against the poststructuralist assumption that signs are primarily – and, in some cases, only – signifiers. They write that

the question here is not whether there are signs on every stratum but whether all signs are endowed with significance, whether the semiotics of signs is necessarily linked to a semiology of the signifier. (*A Thousand Plateaus* 68)

Their concern is that the (post-) structuralist view of language as all-encompassing – a view exemplified by Catherine Belsey's claim, referenced in the introduction, that

signification is “the only track we can confidently claim to follow” (*Desire* 77) – will result in a complete abandonment of the sign in favor of the signifier/signified relationship. However, if the signifier/signified relationship, the uncritical valorization of the sign’s signifying function, and the idea that the world is made up of only signifiers and therefore can only be described or theorized in terms of signification are supplanted by “double articulation,” where “form of content” and “form of expression” exist “in a state of reciprocal presupposition” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 72), then the sign becomes a conflation of distinct forms that always-already imply one another. Signs become a matter of territorialization and of direct, acontextual action on (not within) the spectator.

Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari’s work, along with Hansen’s “architectural sign” derived from it, align quite well with Statues’ view of the theatrical sign as more than merely “referential” and with Heywood’s and Prynne’s discussions of theatrical signs’ potential for operating directly on audiences. The argument becomes more difficult to make, however, when a Brechtian-style anti-illusionism in which performers and playwrights consciously call attention to the theatrical, fictional nature of the performance is introduced into it. Whereas Brecht believed that representations on stage could serve to challenge power structures offstage, Deleuze found such challenges problematic precisely *because of* the power that theatrical representations exerted on audiences. In his essay on subtractions and “amputations” of power in Carmelo Bene’s *Richard III*, Deleuze argues that productions that genuinely critique a system of power do not merely account for or call attention to the power of representation; instead, they acknowledge that “the actual power of theater, even if it is a critical representation, is inseparable from a representation of power in the theater” (“Manifesto” 241). Brecht’s



representations, according to Deleuze, exerted power on an audience as a means of critiquing a system of power. In place of Brechtian representation and metatheatrical commentaries on power, Deleuze and Bene offer a nonrepresentational theater in which the sign acts, but without reasserting the power structures that it seeks to challenge.

Although Brecht's theories of "gestic" acting put forth in his *Short Organum for the Theatre* can to some degree describe signs and signaletic forces operating from the stage rather than on the text, his work, unlike Deleuze's, focuses on story – gestures are, after all, ultimately perceptible, metatheatrical "knots" that tie together "individual episodes" in epic storytelling (Brecht 200-201) -- and holds that theatrical forces operate via political-like exertions of power, not merely via asignifying forces. Additionally, much of the work on Deleuzian affect theory produced during the last ten years strongly rejects the Brechtian penchant for judgment and contextualization that early moderns anxious about signaletic forces seem to have themselves adopted (see section IV below).<sup>xxvi</sup> Still, both Deleuze's and Brecht's work can be useful for theorizing the distinct-yet-related anti-illusionisms that informed early modern stage practices because Brechtian theatrical practices made contextualization possible for early moderns who claimed that contextualization was necessitated by the dangers posed by direct, acontextual signaletic forces.

#### IV.

I find Prynne's claim that there is no distinction between onstage and offstage Scriptural violations to be remarkably similar to a claim that Jean Baudrillard makes via a challenge he poses to his twentieth-century readers: he dares them to successfully stage a "fake holdup" (Baudrillard 39). Though Baudrillard is concerned mainly with questions

of simulation-as-reality, his challenge here implies that a fake holdup would result in the same effects and punishments that “real” holdup would result in. The factor that Baudrillard does not explicitly consider, however, is the degree to which the holdup’s “audience” would be complicit in the fakery. His supposedly impossible challenge presumes (perhaps rightly, for Europeans and Americans in the 1970s) that most people would be inclined to take a “fake” holdup seriously, that the simulation would be identical to reality.

Early modern writers on both sides of the debate about theater’s moral status, on the other hand, did take the audience factor into account and suggested that context either mattered or should be made to matter when sins were enacted onstage. Gosson, for instance, addresses contextual issues in his discussion of the “lye” in *Playes Confuted in Five Actions*, arguing that

The discipline we gette by playes is like the justice that a certain schoolmaster taught in Persia, which taught his schollers to lye, and not to lye; to deceive, and not to deceive, with a distinction howe they might doe it to their friends, & to their enemies.” (*Playes Confuted* 28)

Here, the practice of lying is portrayed not as a clear-cut violation of a preset moral code, but as an act that is ethically problematic because of the ways in which liars can take advantage of contextual shifts, choosing when to lie and when not to lie.

In *The Schoole of Abuse*, which was perhaps the least harsh of his anti-theatrical invectives, Gosson maintains that context should always be a concern because “fyre is as hurtfull as it is healthie; water is as daungerous as it is commodious” (*Schoole* 12). On these grounds, Gosson is able to argue (here, much more so than in *Playes Confuted*, in

which he altogether rejects the stage) that the English theater could serve moral, genuinely didactic purposes if only audiences were given a means for judging onstage actions and making changes in their own lives after seeing a play. The problem with theater, according to Gosson, is that audiences are not explicitly told or taught how to judge and morally evaluate onstage actions. In Gosson's view, the inclusion of music in the plays and the fact that the theater is presented as entertainment rather than education work against this possibility, making "rebukes" both to and from the audience seem less harsh than they should (*Schoole* 21).<sup>xxvii</sup> Such rebukes are only possible, in other words, if actors, writers, and managers can find a way to give meaning to and pass judgment on representational signs and signaletic forces, reminding audience members that they are supposed to learn and discern.

Though the idea of providing audiences with a means for judging onstage actions is indeed proto-Brechtian, Brecht, much unlike Gosson, did not believe that learning and amusement had to work against one another. In his essay "Theater for Pleasure or Theater for Instruction?" (c. 1931), Brecht posits that individualistic societies – perhaps the Elizabethans and Jacobean might be included in this, to some degree – tend not to recognize that the instructive or didactic theater can and should also serve to amuse audience members and actors, a possibility that Gosson did not explicitly consider in his otherwise-Brechtian argument that the English stage could serve a useful purpose if audiences were *empowered* with reflective faculties.

Of course, the idea that the same medium could be both educational and entertaining was not unheard of when Gosson was writing. In his reply to *The Schoole of Abuse*, Thomas Lodge writes that "Chaucer can in pleasant vain rebuke sin uncontrol'd"

(Lodge 15) and also that “those of judgement can from the same flower suck honey with the bee, from whence the Spyder (I mean the ignorant) take their poison” (35). Lodge holds that stage plays should not be proscribed, since they can help those who are already somewhat capable or executing judgment on onstage actions.

Heywood, too, believed that most citizens were capable of deriving education and entertainment rather than corruption and debauchery from stage plays. This aspect of his argument hinges on the idea that most people are not easily swept up in illusion; when male actors playing the roles of women adopted anti-illusionistic practices (see Chapter 1 for more about the specifically proto-Brechtian implications of this passage in *The Apologie for Actors*), they reminded audiences that in the theatrical context, their actions, which could be taken as effectively indistinct from those taking place offstage, nevertheless did not technically comprise violations of the law laid out in the Old and New Testaments because they were occurring in the context of performance.

Early modern dramas often turn to a proto-Brechtian metatheatrics in which audience members are slyly reminded that they are watching actors performing a rehearsed event not necessarily during those moments when ideological critique is apparently called for, but rather during what might be considered (by opponents of the theater, at least) their most “morally questionable” moments. For instance, Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy* suggests that onstage and offstage murders can be easily conflated, and directly addresses the question of whether “personating” a murderer is the same as actually committing a murder by overtly calling attention to the ways in which murders are performed or acted. Hieronimo describes Lorenzo and Balthazar, the man who murdered his son, as “actors in th’ accursed tragedy” (3.7.43); those who *performed* the

murder are categorized as *actors*. Later, Hieronimo carries out his revenge and commits additional murders by staging a play-within-a-play in which scripted murders constitute the “actual” (within *The Spanish Tragedy*) killings of Lorenzo and Balthazar (4.4).

According to writers like Prynne, onstage and offstage murders are effectively similar; *The Spanish Tragedy* calls attention to this possibility by overtly conflating the two in its final play-within-a-play.

Shakespeare’s plays, too, sometimes introduce metatheatrics when the onstage action might be rendered questionable because of the operations of signalethic forces.<sup>3</sup> *Henry VI* stages an uncomfortable scenario in which a Lancastrian king, silenced by both his advisor and his wife (2.2.116-125), is portrayed as significantly weaker than a king from the House of York; this situation would constitute not only a representation but an actual political critique of the family with which Henry VIII and Elizabeth I were associated. The scenario is rendered theatrical – in the sense of the word that suggests artifice or metamediation – in the next scene: Warwick, who is trying to install Edward as King, tells Edward and his brother Richard that it is time to take action, not to “look upon, as if the tragedy / Were played in jest by counterfeiting actors” (2.3.27-28), perhaps informing audience members that the events of Act 2, Scene 2 are to be received as merely “jests” performed by “counterfeiting actors,” not as an actual critique of the ancestors of Elizabeth I.

In *Twelfth Night*, Malvolio’s response to what he believes is a letter from Olivia comprises three actions that Prynne, Gosson, and Stubbes would have found offensive and against Biblical sensibilities: Malvolio acts like a madman (which would indicate, for Prynne, that the actor playing him actually was a madman), dresses inappropriately (an

Old Testament offense), and disparages God (an even more serious Biblical offense). Fabian reacts to Malvolio's actions by commenting, "if this were played upon a stage now, I could condemn it as an improbable fiction" (3.4.127-128), once again reminding audiences that Malvolio's onstage madness, inappropriate manner of dress, and blasphemy ought to be considered contextually as part of an "improbable fiction."

*The Changeling*, meanwhile, calls attention to its own rehearsedness – a move that was, for Brecht, an important method of reminding audience members that they were watching a staged vent and not peeking through a hole drilled in a fourth wall – when Alsemero first kisses Beatrice-Joanna. Here, an actor kisses another actor, an action which perhaps calls to mind Rainolds' and Prynne's complaints about transvestism on the English stage; also, character-wise, a suitor kisses the already-betrothed lover who will soon become a "cruel murd'ress" (5.3.62). Jasperino, witnessing the scene, comments, "in my conscience he ne'er rehearsed it before" (1.1.63-64), announcing to the audience that the scene was indeed *rehearsed* for the purpose of staging a theater performance and that the kiss is taking place in a context that should be considered theatrical.

Later, Alsemero, speaking to DeFlores, the man who has essentially raped his wife, vitriolically says, "rehearse again / Your scene of list, that you may be perfect / When you shall act it to the black audience" (5.3.114). Once again, members of the play's audience are asked to notice that they are watching a pre-rehearsed. Further, however, they are also asked to judge DeFlores (and perhaps also Alsemero) as harshly as would the residents of hell. It was this act of judgment that could, for Brecht and the early modern English (although, of course, not for Deleuze according to his conception of

theatrical practices), permit audiences to think about signs and actions that might otherwise affect them negatively.

## V.

Because it engaged one form of anti-illusionism (metatheatrical practices and commentary intended to remind audiences of the theatrical context of the performance) as a means of dealing with another form of anti-illusionism (acontextual signaletic forces), the proto-Brechtian method of countering anxieties related to the force of the theatrical sign might have been at times notably circular. John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, a play whose signaletic forces are more often than not uncontainable, will supply a useful example of how this circularity might have operated.

In itself, *'Tis Pity* illustrates some of the issues that writers like Gosson and Prynne had with the practice of executing similar acts in different contexts. Giovanni and Annabella's banter upon emerging from her bedroom in 2.1 might be considered a pleasantly bawdy and humorous interaction between young lovers à la *Romeo and Juliet* were Ford's characters not siblings, and their bedroom conversation in 5.5 would take on an entirely different timbre were Giovanni not about to murder his pregnant sister. Many of the actions performed by Giovanni and Annabella are, in fact, the same as those performed in *Romeo and Juliet*, except that they are set in the context of incest and sororicide.

There are in the play some genuinely disconcerting moments that can be considered purely signaletic and not metamediative or theatrical in that they in no way call attention to the fact that audiences *should* deem them disconcerting. Indeed, it is

likely that *'Tis Pity* has not often been staged in the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries because audiences to this day find this early modern drama's uncritical romanticization of incest extraordinarily disturbing; newspaper and magazine reviews of recent performances in San Francisco (American Conservatory Theater, 2008) and New York City (Toy Box Theatre Company, 2009) were almost always prefaced with warnings that the play was not for the squeamish.<sup>xxviii</sup>

Giovanni's justification of his murdering Annabella, addressed *to* Annabella, strangely reveals courage, romantic love, and familial devotion, characteristics that do not, according to conventional judgment, match the "character" or the situation from which they purportedly emerge. He remains devoted when he blames his brother-in-law Soranzo for the murder that he himself has just committed, arguing, "I have prevented now thy reaching plots, / And killed a love, for whose each drops of blood, / I would have pawned my heart" (5.5.100-102). In the theater, where there is no printed text to which to refer and no "rewind button" of any sort, Giovanni's description in 5.6 of plunging a knife through Annabella's womb into her heart (31-33) followed by his parading through a banquet holding that heart cannot alter the Romeo-like speeches that he gave in the previous scene; audience members would likely not have the time or opportunity to morally re-evaluate those speeches after the moment has passed.

Together with its disconcertingly immediate moments of incestuous love and murder, the play also at times employs a rather Brechtian critique of destiny, with Giovanni (perhaps not unlike Marlowe's Tamburlaine) taking advantage of what he believes to be Annabella's faith in destiny in order to manipulate her into consummating their relationship. Giovanni lies mercilessly so that he might convince his sister that a



sexual relationship between the two of them would not be improper; he at one point informs Annabella that his “destiny” is either to love her or to die (1.2.249-249). He assures her that he has tried to fight this desire, that he has “despised [his] fate” (245), and much later uses destiny again to justify his killing Annabella (5.5.59-62). And, although the siblings themselves do not explicitly moralize or contextualize their actions within the play, two characters are briefly given the opportunity to moralize and properly “frame” the preceding events at the play’s conclusion: Richardetto tells the surviving characters: “Thus long I have lived disguised / To see the effect of pride and lust at once / Brought both to shameful ends” (5.6.160-162), while the Cardinal, also summarizing the events of the play, asks, “Who could not say, ‘Tis pity she’s a whore’?” (168), both passing judgment on Annabella and reminding the members of the audience that they are watching a play entitled *‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore*.

*‘Tis Pity*’s metatheatrics, however, do not entirely hinge on brief moments of straightforward moralizing or heavy-handed ideological critique such as those described above. The play is also metatheatrical throughout (perhaps even more so than a play like *The Changeling*, which relies on occasional mentions of rehearsal to encourage audience contextualization and reflection) because of its citation of supposedly more innocuous plays like *Romeo and Juliet* via post-coital banter, a “balcony scene,” and a well-meaning Friar character. Raymond Powell has further noted that although the *Romeo and Juliet* citations are rather obvious, *‘Tis Pity* also more subtly cites *Othello*, especially when Giovanni murders Annabella in her bed; Ford thus seems to adapt Othello’s anger towards Desdemona over an imagined affair to Giovanni’s anger towards Annabella over her marriage to Soranzo. Because *‘Tis Pity* engages such citational metatheatrics,

reminding audiences of a variety of uncomfortable equivalences, it might be said that the play's main distancing, metatheatrical element *is* its demonstration of how signs can (for some, rather disconcertingly) operate in the same way even if they are executed in different contexts.

In sum, early modern debates about whether audiences were capable of understanding issues of context seem to suggest one possible reason for the adoption of proto-Brechtian practices studied by critics like Jonathan Dollimore and Graham Holderness: they rendered audiences capable of judgment when signs purportedly most *needed* to be judged, at least according to those writing both against and in support of the English theater. The debates themselves seem to have been precipitated by anxieties about the directness and arepresentationality of the theatrical sign, a concept perhaps best theorized via the work of Gilles Deleuze, who argued that the practice of metatheatrical judgment simply reasserted the power structures that metatheatrics was supposed to comment on and escape from. Thus, the mode of dual anti-illusionism that I have presented in this chapter can seem circular and perhaps somewhat self-contradictory. Yet during the English Renaissance, when concepts of theater were quite fluid and often paradoxical, it is possible that two sometimes-contradictory philosophies operated in tandem to create a dual anti-illusionism. The notion of “you are what you act” opened up non-Aristotelian, non-fatalistic possibilities for theater performance, while the direct signaletic forces concept (which worried not only detractors from but also supporters of the English stage) could have in itself worked to strip away illusion, naïveté, and the willing suspension of disbelief so that audience members would be able to think, and not

be, in Brecht's words, "carried along" (Brecht 25) by a performance informed by illusionism and fatalism.

## CHAPTER 4

### "WE CONFOUND KNOWLEDGE WITH KNOWLEDGE": A POSTHUMANIST "READING" OF WEBSTER'S *THE WHITE DEVIL*

In the second act of John Webster's *The White Devil*, a conjurer promises the adulterous Duke Brachiano a direct encounter with the murders of his wife Isabella and his lover's husband, Camillo. Though the murders are occurring elsewhere and in two different locations, the conjurer tells Brachiano that he will be able to "show you by my strong-commanding art / The circumstance that breaks your Duchess' heart" (2.2.22-23), insisting that he is no false magician using "sophistic tricks" or speaking "fustian Latin" (20). But after witnessing the murders, which are presented to him and the audience as dumbshows, Brachiano complains that "'Twas quaintly done, but yet each circumstance / I taste not fully" (37-38). The conjurer must assure him that he can believe what he saw, that his "eye ... can inform [him] / The engine of all" (38-45).

According to some early modern anatomy texts, the conjurer is right: Brachiano should be able to know or understand, and perhaps even morally evaluate, the scenes presented before him based on what his eyes report to his brain. For André DuLaurens, writing in the sixteenth century, sight is the "noblest" sense because much of the spiritual realm, including knowledge of God, can only be approached via sight (DuLaurens 12-14). All of the senses, sight of course included, are supposed to serve as "spyes and faithful reportsmen" to the brain (6), such that unfaithful reports or know reports at all

would indicate illness or “corruption” (12). But for Brachiano, seeing is not nearly enough. His problem, the play suggests, is not that he cannot trust what he sees; he does tell the conjurer, after all, that the dumbshow is “bind[ing] and shall enforce a payment” (2.2.51-54). Rather, it seems that he is presented as unsettled and unsatisfied because he cannot *encounter* what he sees.

Brachiano desires a specific type of encounter: sensory and cognitive ownership of the event, or a “feeling” that it happened *for* him. It would seem that if a perceptible event occurs within the vicinity of an individual, this type of encounter should be readily available and perhaps also inseparable from the event itself. In Brachiano’s, Vittoria’s, and Francisco’s struggles to encounter events, truths, and ghosts with their eyes and tongues, *The White Devil* presents a strikingly posthumanist scenario in which characters can use neither their senses nor their rational minds (if the play even suggests the possibility of attributing “rational minds” to its personae) to effect personalized or phenomenological encounters. There are, for example, elements of Isabella’s murder that remain, according to the play, entirely unapproachable and unhumanizable for the husband who arranged that murder.

*The White Devil* thus seems to call for a *posthumanist reading*. This chapter carries out such a reading, discussing, via *The White Devil*, *Arden of Faversham*, and DuLaurens and Helkia Crooke’s anatomy texts, three facts of early modern (and also posthumanist) anxieties of sensory and “personal” encounter: (1) the political, or power-based, implications of the senses’ tendency to operate at a distance rather than bridge distances, (2) early modern anatomy texts’ problematic insistence that humans are supposed to be able to “know” via the sense of sight and to some degree touch and taste,

and (3) the ways in which the senses' potential status as nonpersonal points to the difficulties inherent in the concept of personal encounter in general. Further, in rehearsing what I term a *posthumanist reading* (a phrase that certainly warrants the complication that I provide below), this chapter seeks a mode of thinking about early modern sensory and corporeal anxieties that takes biology into account without resorting to essentialism.

## I.

The concept of the "posthumanist reading" is oxymoronic and seriously problematic in at least two senses: first, "readings" of drama often cannot help but engage the play's *dramatis personae*; engaging the personae implies a focus on character which in turn implies – even when the characters are not supposed to be or represent psychologically rounded people – a focus on the human; second, the term "reading" suggests a humanistic lens-based model of interpretation, with a human reader gazing through a lens that filters and refracts a consciousness operating on the text.

In drama, especially early modern drama, the link between *persona* and character is not a necessary one. When Leeds Barroll challenged A.C. Bradley's conception of tragedy as inhering in a character's suffering – an idea which almost invariably led to questions of "motivation" not entirely appropriate to the early modern stage – he interrogated the assumption that exterior actions and speeches, even those reliably represented by dramatic texts, could clue readers and audiences in to a character's interior life. Distinguishing "real human beings" from characters who are "illusion-products of the author's artistic constructions" (Barroll 3), Barroll finds that characters onstage are comprised of *affections*, or emotions consisting of impulses that emerge instinctually (but, unlike anti- and posthumanist affects, *from* the human). The problem with a writer's

or actor's setting up "“very human” actions and reactions,” Barroll writes, is that “the artistic result can only be a generalized “mankind”” (101); representations of “human nature” tend to be far too general and may, in some cases (as Brecht suggested), encourage complacency, Barroll also warns against psychologizing human nature in order to read character, as “scholarly research often exhibits a tendency to equate symptom with cause” (101-102), or to explain *all* behaviors on stage via disease, psychological or otherwise. The term “character,” it seems, has been all-too-often conflated with the idea of presenting psychologically realistic (though ironically overgeneralized) personae who may be “read” via symptomatology.

Ultimately, Barroll's attempt to distinguish “stage life” from “real life” is grounded in naturalistic theories of the performance of instinctive behaviors in the theater. Where for Barroll these behaviors, though connected to the logic of the stage rather than to the human, were nevertheless thought to emerge from a humanlike origin, posthumanism offers tools with which to think onstage impulses and acts beyond behavioral naturalism. Henry Turner's recent essay on posthumanist conceptions of character in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example, centers on a question not unlike the one that Barroll's study asks: “is the dramatic character a form of “life”?” Turner then goes on to write that

A version of this question seems to me to haunt the antitheatrical objections that were so loudly voiced in Shakespeare's period, not to mention the history of criticism on Shakespeare's own characters.”

(Turner 202)

Because of the plausibility of artificial life, critics now have to actually consider, rather than dismiss, questions that Prynne and Gosson asked about “personation” (204-205).

Turner suggests that for the early modern English, dramatic character was not an attempt to represent real life or any form of interior thought, but rather was a pre-artificial intelligence, pre-computer programming form of posthumanistic experimentation with what constitutes “life.” Turner’s work (as well as Barroll’s, despite its semi-humanistic stance) asserts that the posthumanist problem with character warrants further exploration of the concept of character, not a dismissal of character as a humanistic construct that should be avoided altogether.

Tellingly, Deleuze and Guattari, positing that philosophy is “knowledge through pure concepts” (*What is Philosophy?* 7) that can radically dismantle the humanistic subject-object relationship, demonstrate that posthumanist critiques of subjectivity and psychological character do not necessitate an outright rejection of *persona*. “Conceptual personae,” they write, are invented and reinvented much like concepts are; they “play a part” in the creation of concepts but are not the creators, as they do not set concepts forth (62-63) and yet they can be said to be “the true agents of enunciation” (65). They are involved in and refer to the creation of concepts but do not perform the act of creating them. Finally, conceptual personae are not “psychosocial types,” or any aesthetic or psychological version of character, although there are “constant penetrations” and references among these ideas (67). Character is involved in concept-creation in that the conceptual persona refers to (yet does not fully signify) character; Deleuze and Guattari never engage *personae* uncritically via naïve consciousness-based psychologies.

For Deleuze and Guattari, the conceptual persona is also an *event* rather than an individual “person” or “character.” The reading of *The White Devil* that follows operates perhaps more along the lines of Turner’s recent work, where personae (or, characters from a non-psychological perspective) are *experiments* in artificial life; they are lives without a psychosocial components, lives that comprise only behavior and not thought. . And, although *The White Devil* does indeed stage political and ideological critiques without fully resorting to character, it often uses its personae – whose actions both suggest and generate uncomfortable frustrations – to stage posthumanist anxieties of sensory encounter. The *dramatis personae*, in other words, are necessary to the creation of these anxieties.

The other main problem with the “posthumanist reading” is that one cannot “read” a text posthumanistically as one might read a text *through the lens of* New Historicism or psychoanalysis or structural linguistics. The “lens” metaphor implies that there is a human mind working to produce a reading by *looking through* a theory or concept and replaces the body with the eye and the “reading” mind, relying on the human (who looks through a filter of sorts) to originate meaning. I am not arguing that there cannot be posthumanist readings – this chapter, of course, constitutes one – but rather noting that posthumanist theory renders the “lens” model, or “thinking X through Y lens,” unnecessary. Neither the rational, meaning-originating human nor the theoretical lens, in other words, is necessary to a “reading.”

Although he would likely reject the concept of the “posthumanist reading” on the grounds that it is still a “reading” and could therefore still imply humanistic meaning-creation, Massumi does offer a model for working posthumanistically within the



humanities. He argues for a mode of “invention” that is not necessarily radically anti-humanistic, noting that “if you want to invent or reinvent concepts, the first rule of thumb is simple: don’t apply them” (Massumi 17). Conceptual (re)invention cannot happen in the application model because the concepts remain the same while the textual “material” changes; these changes, for Massumi, have “less to do with invention than mastery and control” (17). Thus, the posthumanist reading should not involve a subject applying pressure to a text via concepts until the text shifts under those concepts’ weight.

The central problem with the application model, according to Massumi, is not so much the “violence” that fixed concepts seem to do to the textual material – he does suggest, after all, that concepts can change “more or less violently” when confronted with new examples or systems (18-19) – but with applied concepts’ fixedness in all contexts. “If you know where you will end up when you begin,” Massumi writes, “nothing has happened in the meantime” (18). One example of this phenomenon within the study of Renaissance drama are those Lacanian readings – for example, Catherine Belsey’s cultural histories of desire and the early modern family – that have been rigorously executed but nevertheless critiqued for not taking into account even Lacan’s own changes to his theories of development and desire.<sup>xxix</sup>

Importantly, avoiding application does not mean avoiding method. Massumi proposes a method of exemplification that constitutes experimentation within the humanities. By “extracting [concepts] from their usual connection to other concepts in their home system or confronting them with the example or a detail from it” (18-19), the example is able to intervene in and change the concept. The previous chapter of this dissertation can be said to constitute a “posthumanist reading” in this vein because it

borrowes the concept of the “sign that is what it signifies” that is supposed to be “vocationally specific” to architecture (Hansen 169) and extends that concept to the early modern theater via specific concerns about signaletic forces found in anti-theatrical tracts. Also, it is able to offer an additional or alternate version of anti-illusionism when the concept of anti-illusionism itself is extracted from its typical Brechtian associations.

Hansen executes a posthumanist reading of Mark Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* as symptomatic of a “*media-technical*, and not simply stylistic or formal, shift in the function of the novel” (222) while critiquing and resisting the lens model of working with theoretical concepts. Hansen could have easily used or applied the concept of the “body-in-code” that he developed in previous chapters of his book as a lens through which to view *House of Leaves*; however, he instead calls upon Danielewski’s novel *as* a body-in-code, an instance of rather than a metaphor for or representation of or proof of that concept, in order to examine how the novel questions the assumed link between embodiment and representation. Posthumanist readings like Hansen’s allow the theory to operate with the text rather than serve as a lens intended to de-blur comprehension for the reading subject, who then infuses that text with phenomenological meaning.

Also worth addressing here are Hayles’ readings of cyberpunk and science fiction novels; some of these readings may at first seem rather humanist, especially when she reads Bernard Wolfe’s and Philip K. Dick’s fiction via their biographies (calling upon, at one point, Dick’s relationship with his mother) and influences. However, the posthumanist payoff happens when Hayles examines how Wolfe’s *Limbo* is in itself a reading of Norbert Wiener’s work on cybernetics. Here, Hayles uses the humanist view not to execute a humanist reading herself, but to critique the implications of control and

mastery that humanist accounts of cybernetics entail. For example, describing a rape that takes place within the novel, Hayles notes, “here the rape occurs within a context where Wolfe is in control of the dynamics, for it reflects his own deeply misogynistic views” (Hayles 122); yet, the moments in the novel that are most telling about cybernetic anxieties are those that are apparently beyond authorial control. Though misogyny is the norm for the author, it is not the norm for a set of “unidentifiable” (and in a sense cybernetic) voices in the novel (130).

Hayles uses cyberpunk novels to exemplify and rethink concepts of character and signification; she is able to use “readings” of these novels to argue that new media change the experience of signification. For instance, the computer, which is much more than a word processor, to a large degree does away with the idea of one-to-one correspondence associated with the typewriter and its keys. Further, fiction’s cyborg is itself a “doubly articulated” figure in that there is no difference between metaphorical (technologies that extend the body via telepresence) and actual (artificial joints, corneal implants, etc.) cyborgism (115). A rethinking of signification and the rhetoric of presence and absence along new media lines can, according to Hayles, bring about radical changes to the concepts of point of view and character.

Because the theory operates with rather than on the text, Hansen and Hayles can be said to stage posthumanist interventions in twentieth- and twenty-first century fiction. Here, I will stage similar interventions by examining what seem to be posthumanist moments in *The White Devil*; in order to do so, however, posthumanist conceptions of consciousness, the senses, and the body must be dislodged somewhat from their familiar setting amongst cybernetics, new media, and twenty-first century biology and relocated

to early modern England, where they become less about media skepticism and more about sensory anxieties.

## II.

In Act 4, Scene 1 of *The White Devil*, Francisco seems to bolster the idea that consciousness is all-powerful when he mentally summons his dead sister to the stage. He decides that instead of asking for a “picture” of Isabella, he will “close [his] eyes” (4.1.97) and attempt to actualize her via imagination; almost immediately, Isabella’s ghost appears on stage.

In a study of the ways in which *The White Devil* both invites audiences to identify with its tragic characters and creates, via satire, a critical distance between the audience and performance (staging, to borrow Marie-Laure Ryan’s terms, the shift back and forth from the “space travel vehicle” to the “telescopic” mode of spectatorship), George F. Sensabaugh finds Isabella’s ghost to serve as a window into Francisco’s internal debate about whether he should avenge his sister’s death. She functions, in a sense, as a typical Renaissance stage ghost; although Francisco willfully calls on her, she clearly incites revenge when Francisco “has not yet decided” (Sensabaugh 355). Other critics, including Judith Weil, have read Isabella’s ghost as a figure that Francisco immediately dismisses. For Weil, in labeling Isabella’s appearance an “old wives’ story,” Francisco (and Webster) “reminds the audience of what *The White Devil* is not: an unsophisticated, fabulous tale often intended to entertain children” (Weil 328).

Indeed, Francisco's response to the ghost's appearance suggests that he acknowledges that Isabella is not really present and that the ghost he seems to have summoned serves no actual function. He comments, "How strong / Imagination works! How she can frame / Things which are not!" (4.1.99-101) and then notes that "thought, as a subtle juggler, makes us deem / Things supernatural which have cause / common as sickness" (104-106). Finally, he chides himself for his own foolishness after he asks the ghost how she died (107-108). Francisco is shown, as Weil claims, to dismiss the ghost; in my view, however, because he appears to recognize the ghost as a figment of his imagination or a "melancholic thought" (98), his actions challenge the assumption that "thinking makes it so," that consciousness could possibly be so significant as to affect anything outside of itself.

Compare, for example, Francisco's reaction to that of Shakespeare's Brutus, who, on seeing Caesar's ghost, initially says, "I think it is the weakness of mine eyes / That shapes this monstrous apparition" (*JC* 4.3.263-274) but soon wants to "hold more talk" with him (285) and ultimately believes that the deceased Caesar has the power to affect the outcome of the battle at Philippi (5.3.93-95). For Francisco, on the other hand, Isabella's ghost never becomes more than a mere picture in his imagination; she is not, as ghosts customarily were in English Renaissance drama, an agent or encourager of revenge. Asking himself, "What have I to do / With tombs, or death beds, funerals or tears, / That have to meditate upon revenge?" (4.1.110-112), Francisco decides to write a letter declaring his love for Vittoria not because the ghost has incited in him an overwhelming desire for revenge (he makes no reference to the ghost in his soliloquy here, after all), but because his "tragedy must have some idle mirth in it / Else it will

never pass” (116-117). Ultimately, Brachiano is not undone by Francisco’s rather “thoughtful” act of vengeance but by Lodovico, who takes action and physically poisons the duke.

There is also an instance of what one might call a proto-posthumanist “ghost” in Act 5, Scene 3 of Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi* that is worth addressing here because of its (eventual) similarity Francisco’s hallucinatory interaction with Isabella. When an echo that sounds very much like the dead Duchess conveniently repeats significant parts of Antonio and Delio’s conversation, Antonio at first seems to suggest that the echo/ghost is substantial, telling it, “I will not talk with thee / For thou art a dead thing” (5.3.38-39). And, when the question “Shall I never see her more?” is echoed with “Never see her more,” Antonio believes that he sees “a face folded in sorrow” (42-45); Delio, however, assures him that it is his “fancy, merely” (46). This comment apparently serves as a prompt for Antonio to decide that he will “be out of this ague; / For to live thus is not indeed to live: / It is a mockery, and an abuse of life” (47-49). “To live thus,” it seems, would be to live wrapped up in one’s own melancholic imagination.

The trope of ghosts produced by melancholic imagination will, of course, invite further comparison with Shakespeare’s dramas. Note that the ghosts in *Hamlet* and *Richard III* command not (quite) revenge but “thought,” which is far more threatening for Shakespeare’s characters: Hamlet seems more disconcerted by the Ghost’s demand for remembrance than by his command to avenge his murder (*Ham* 1.5.92-112), and the ghosts in *Richard III* torment Richard by asking him to “think of,” “think on,” and “think upon” them (*R3* 5.3.119-177). Even though Shakespeare’s ghosts are supposed to operate more on the mind than on the body, and even though the dramas at times seem to

privilege the mind over the body, these ghosts are not marked as hallucinations as the ghosts of Isabella and the Duchess of Malfi are. Put differently, Webster leaves room for a critique of the power of the mind because ghosts who are supposed to work on the mind – “motivational” ghosts, perhaps – are dismissed as merely hallucinatory products of melancholy.

As he dies from Lodovico’s poison in Act 5, Brachiano hallucinates a devil but clearly does not recognize the hallucination as such, even as Vittoria and Flamineo insist that they see nothing beside his bed. With his brain compromised by the poison that was delivered through his hat, Brachiano tries to encounter the hallucination (albeit metaphorically) with his tongue: “I’ll dispute with him / He’s a rare linguist” (5.3.101-102). Brachiano’s failure once again to effect a linguistic encounter will problematize the possibility for sensory encounter within the play and will call into question the supposed connections between the senses and consciousness.

### **III.**

Brachiano’s attempt to encounter the devil by debating him, paired with his apparent need to “taste the circumstances” of Isabella’s murder, suggests that in the play, the tongue-as-metaphor functions similarly to the tongue-as-organ. Thus, the tongue-as-metaphor in this context can be said to serve not as a representation but as an operator; the metaphor can be thought not merely in terms of what it signifies, but in terms of what it does. Vittoria, too, conflates the tongue’s linguistic capacities with its sensory functions when she is tried for Camillo’s murder. When she defends herself, her pleas reveal the limitations of organs that are supposed to permit the rational mind to understand what is happening to and in the vicinity of the body.

Vittoria does not want her trial conducted in Latin and argues that although she can speak the language, she “will not have [her] accusation clouded / In a strange tongue” (3.2.18-19). Though “clouded” typically implies shading from sight, here, the tongue – perhaps synaesthetically – does the clouding, becoming a vehicle for purposeful confusion. Vittoria then objects to the lawyer’s Latinate terms “exorbitant” and “exulceration,” which she finds “hard and undigestible” (34-38), ultimately complaining that women can only use words (or, tongues) for revenge: “O woman’s poor revenge / which dwells but in the tongue” (283-84). The tongue, which can confuse and “cloud,” is nevertheless not enough to permit the accused to enact revenge on her accusers.

Carla Mazzio describes these lingual/linguistic anxieties as anxieties of “linguistic, numeral, and conceptual repetitions” that are mostly about encoding (Mazzio 55), implying, perhaps, that the tongue was in the early modern era primarily an organ of representation. She does, however, also put forth a convincing argument about early modern tongues and the fear of the ways in which an organ could bridge non-representational distances: what was threatening about the tongue was that it, “unlike the ears, hands, and feet, was able to move beyond the bounds of immediate material circumstances, to *literally* affect lives from a distance” (57). The tongue, a sensory and speech organ, could, like the eyes, act at a distance; Brachiano, finding that his eyes fail him, selects an alternate organ of encounter that early moderns believed operated in a manner oddly similar to that of the eye.

During her trial, Vittoria seems to rely on the notion that although certain senses can appear to act at a distance, they ultimately can only sense what is immediately before them. Pleading her innocence to Monticelso, she says,



... My lord Cardinal,

Were your intelligencing ears as long

As to my thoughts, had you an honest tongue,

I would not care though you had proclaimed them all. (3.2.228-231)

Monticelso, the judges, and, perhaps more importantly, readers and audiences, may find themselves (if Monticelso and the judges may be referred to as “selves” in any sense) unable to use their eyes, ears, and tongues to determine whether or not Vittoria was a co-conspirator in her first husband’s murder. This inconclusive scenario might have been problematic for the early modern English, who were, at least according to medical texts that addressed controversies about the sensory organs, supposed to be able to use the senses to approach, encounter, and *know*.

According to André DuLaurens, the senses, as “spyers and faithful reportsmen” to the brain (6), are absolutely necessary to the functioning of the soul, which, seated in the brain, is unable to “doe anything but by the aide and assistance of the senses” (12). If the senses should offer “untrue reports” that lead to “conclusions which are often false” (74) or if forms remain “seated in the ayre and eye” but not in the brain (43), then there is a cause for concern and reason to suspect illness, especially melancholy. Similarly, anatomist Helkia Crooke claims that the senses serve the brain, sending it forms that must then be subjected to proper “judgement” (Crooke 45). Once objects and images are perceived, the senses “doe carie them to the Tribunall of the Internall sense and doe informe it, that it is able now to pronounce a true judgement concerning them” (647). The senses perceive; the brain judges.

In Crooke's view, because the senses carry knowledge to the brain, sensation is always the first step in a process of "knowing." Indeed, he goes so far as to argue that proprioception must belong entirely to the brain because the senses can do nothing other than report visual, auditory, and tactile information to a judgment-pronouncing brain.<sup>xxx</sup> Though, as Gail Kern Paster puts it, he does to some degree "imbue body parts with their own affective capacity" (Paster 11), Crooke will not attribute seemingly internal self-image and self-concept to the external senses.

Crooke seems to have been an enthusiastic advocate of the rather humanistic view that one could acquire mastery of a body of knowledge via sensory observation. He recommends dissection as one approach for physicians and surgeons seeking a more detailed knowledge of human anatomy, explaining that "the invisible things of God ... are known by those things that are visible" (14) and later praising a "new manner of dissection of the braine" for allowing physicians to see what was previously merely theorized (493). "If any man doubt" his description of a "web of vessels" in the brain called the "Plexus Choroides," he writes, "wee remit him unto his own ocular inspection there being no argument of greater validitie" (501). Interestingly, although Crooke sides with anatomists and against philosophers (as does DuLaurens) in ranking touch as the primary sense and sight as the least important because touch and taste are "absolutely and simply necessary to our life" (45) whereas sight is not, he nevertheless valorizes sight as a means for understanding God and man, claiming that sight allows us "to admire and contemplate the workes of almighty God" (651).

R. Grant Williams has argued that this view of the senses is based on a "misrecognition" of the body as not only knowable/masterable but also a source, or

microcosm, of knowledge that leads to mastery of all knowledge. Crooke's certainty and Robert Burton's uncertainty about the anatomical body, Williams claims, point to the irony of gaining a whole "body of knowledge through cutting of the body" (Williams 598). And Jonathan Sawday's influential study of dissection in early modern England elucidates this irony, suggesting that the trope of knowledge-via-sensation (especially sight) found in texts like Crooke's glosses over the violent connotations of dissection, which could on one hand "metaphorically" imply "a brutal dismemberment of people, things, or ideas" and on the other – perhaps not so distinct – hand, involve the actual practice of dissecting those who were supposedly meant to be looked at (Sawday 1-3). Because, as Sawday explains, "some Europeans looked to the marginal members of their own societies ... as potential 'material' upon which they could legitimately practice their own researches and investigations into the human form" (8), knowledge as a form of power, and by extension sensation as a form of power, meant exerting power *over* another body.

There is, in *The White Devil*, a recognition of this problematic view of the senses in characters' inability to encounter and exert power or mastery over situations and over other characters. Brachiano seems to seek control over his wife's and Camillo's murders when, failing to comprehend the scene with his eyes, he seeks to "taste" it. Later, Vittoria explains that women are not in positions of power because they have *only* their tongues with which to enact revenge; the tongue, in other words, is also not enough. She is, however, able to manipulate the court to some degree because Monticelso, who claims to want to be able to perceive plainly Vittoria's guilt, can neither encounter this guilt with his ears nor speak it with his tongue.

Questions about sensory encounter in Webster's play are not limited to the issues of power and positionality resulting from expectations set up by anatomists and advocates of knowledge-via-sensation. In the dumbshows, ghosts, and devils, and in the poisoned painting used to murder Isabella, there is also the problem of *personalization*, of a person successfully investing an event with meaning so that (s)he can consciously process his or her experience of that event.

#### IV.

During the dumbshow, Brachiano is shown to witness Isabella's death-by-portrait; she is poisoned by the portrait of him that she keeps in her room. The idea of the poisoned portrait engages the fascinating possibility that one could be murdered by looking at a portrait painted by someone else, without the painter implicating or poisoning himself in the process of creating that portrait. In Renaissance England, poisoning-by-sight may have seemed plausible (at least to playgoers) because of a belief that sight, like touch or taste, literally had to cast something forth ("eye-beams") in order to operate on an object. However, poisoned portraits seem, in to plays in which they figure prominently (*The White Devil* and *Arden of Faversham*), to have functioned for the characters who are presented as experts with poisons as a clever metaphor for other, more conventional methods of poisoning. For readers and audiences, meanwhile, poisoning-by-sight may have suggested that seeing is not quite the personal, individualized – and, of course, humanistic – sense that some might imagine it to be.

Marguerite Tassi has argued that when early modern plays staged murders via poisoned paintings or images, they engaged several anxieties: the presence of crucifixes in both *The White Devil* and *Arden of Faversham*, for instance, suggests "inverted

Catholic rituals” (Tassi 136) and an association with Catholic Italy, while the portraits themselves presented the possibility that “of all the different kinds of painting, the portrait seems to possess an aura of real presence” (140-141), or, perhaps, threatening arepresentational elements. Tassi also notes that there are no references to poisoned portraits outside of dramatic works, even in texts that almost exhaustively describe many other methods of poisoning (139).

Though the theory of “eye-beams” is referenced in the medical and dramatic literature of the period, anatomists like DuLaurens and Crooke rejected it. DuLaurens admits that it would be understandable for those unfamiliar with human anatomy to assume that humans sense by “sending [something] forth” but himself adopts the anatomists’ perspective that “every action of the senses is accomplished by receiving.” He offers a rather logical argument against the eye-beam theory: it is known that the senses weaken as a person ages and that the elderly often develop farsightedness; if eye-beams existed, then a person’s ability to send them out would impossibly (or against common knowledge) have to become stronger as he or she grew older (DuLaurens 41). Yet, the anatomists’ view would not necessarily have made poisoning-by-sight less plausible for theatergoers; it instead opens up the possibility that a painting could cast out poisons that would subsequently be absorbed by the eye.<sup>xxxi</sup>

Whereas poisoning-by-sight may not have explicitly contradicted Renaissance medical theory, *The White Devil*’s Isabella is not killed via her sense of sight, and the play makes this relatively clear. Julio and Christophero must cover both their eyes and noses when poisoning the portrait of Brachiano (SDs 2.2) and the murder is only successful because every night, Isabella “feed[s] her eyes and lips / On the dead shadow”

(2.2.27-28). It can be assumed that at the time the murder takes place, Brachiano already knows that the poison will not work on or via Isabella's eyes but rather will be absorbed through her lips because in the previous scene, he learned from his co-conspirator Flamineo of Julio's ability to "poison a kiss" (2.1.296). And although Julio and Christophero protect their eyes when poisoning the portrait, the presence (and survival) of Giovanni and Lodovico at the moment of Isabella's death strongly suggests that she ingests the poison when she kisses the picture of Brachiano and that the poison does not simply attack anyone in the presence of the portrait.

In *Arden of Faversham*, a poisoning-by-sight is discussed in detail but never carried out. As in *The White Devil*, the poisoner himself rather clearly indicates that his poisoned portraits do not operate on or via the eyes but rather through the tongue and nose. Alice Arden's lover, Mosby, initially offers an explanation for what the painter/poisoner Clarke does that is entirely about sight and eye-beams<sup>xxxii</sup>: he mixes poison with paint so "that whoso looks upon the work he draws, / Shall, with the beams that issue from his sight, / Suck venom to his breast and slay himself" (1.229-231). Later, however, Mosby says that Clarke claimed to be able to create

A crucifix impoisoned

That whoso look upon it should wax blind

And with the scent be stuffed that ere long

He should die poisoned that did view it well (1.608-611),

apparently conflating sight and smell. It is Clarke himself who most explicitly suggests that his *modus operandi* is quite similar to that of Webster's Julio; when Alice asks him how he can paint a poisoned painting without poisoning himself, he explains,

I fasten on my spectacles close  
 as nothing can in any way offend my sight;  
 Then, as I put a leaf within my nose,  
 So put I rhubarb to avoid the smell (1.618-621).

The victim, it seems, is poisoned by the paint's fumes, not by its color or any element that could be absorbed via the sense of sight.

Poisoned portraits in *Arden of Faversham* and *The White Devil* and characters' interactions with them suggest that sight and the metonymical sight-as-consciousness are not quite as powerful as they may seem. While characters and perhaps audiences might initially assume that the poison works not merely *on* the eyes but *via* the sense of sight, the poisoner -figures make it apparent that poisoning-by-sight is merely a preternatural concept or, more likely, a clever metaphor for poisons that actually work when they are ingested or inhaled. However, the mode of poisoning staged in these plays can also serve as commentary on the problems with *personalization-via-sight*, of encountering the world *for oneself*.

Alice most likely protests Mosby's plan to hire Clarke to murder Arden not because she doubts his methods but because she has already promised Mosby's sister Susan to Michael in exchange for *his* killing Arden, and she is certain that Clarke will demand Susan's hand in marriage if the painting successfully ends Arden's life. Alice does, however, express within her protests to Mosby a set of interesting concerns about the (im)possibility of Clarke's creating a poisoned painting intended "just for" her husband. Her comments and questions, though apparently "motivated" by other factors

connected to the plot, nevertheless imply that one cannot control who accesses the visual and that it is extraordinarily difficult to personalize the practice of seeing.

Before she has the opportunity to learn that Clarke's victims are poisoned by inhaling deadly fumes (that might, as per Mosby's comment, also blind them) Alice claims that she is concerned that the painting will accidentally kill her or Mosby, explaining that "For thou or I, or any other else / Coming into the chamber where it hangs, may die" (1.236-237). Mosby recommends that the painting be "covered with a cloth" and hung in Arden's study; still, she fears that her husband will demand that she look too (1.240-241). She not only cannot control her husband's "look" (or gaze, perhaps without the Lacanian connotation of "I'm watching you watching me") but also cannot control her own looking. Here, Alice seems to fear that she will be unable *not* to look.

Sergei Lobanov-Rostovsky, reading various early modern anatomy texts, claims that the apparent relationship between sight and individuality, or sight as an indicator of individuality, was never a biological phenomenon. Anatomists' writing often suggested that

the eye stands in for the mind in the perceiving consciousness, then  
supplants it, as the act of perception comes to define the self to itself ...

Eye becomes "I," the self perched at the edge of the body (Lobanov-Rostovsky 202).

Even so, the idea of "eye" as "I" was, according to Lobanov-Rostovsky, always only a metaphor for knowledge, power, and a "privileged male subjectivity" that DuLaurens and Crooke ironically challenged and deconstructed in their anatomizing the eye, or their



“reduction of the eye to flesh” (197). To control the eye would be to (re)gain complete control over one’s body, an apparent impossibility for Alice and Mosby.

As characters in *The White Devil* are shown to fail to encounter events with their eyes, tongues, and ears, the play critiques a mode of thought in which sight (and, perhaps, by extension, touch, taste, and hearing) represents, feeds, or *is* an individuated consciousness. Like Alice Arden when she questions the logistics of poisoning-by-sight, the play also interrogates the assumption that humans must encounter events and objects by personalizing them.

## V.

When Francisco accuses Brachiano of adultery, Brachiano’s immediate response is “spit thy poison” (2.1.68). He and Francisco then jump from sense to sense in their attempts to personally encounter and (for Brachiano) hide the truth about Brachiano’s relationship with Vittoria. Francisco first retorts with a sonic metaphor: “look to’t, for our anger / Is making thunder-bolts” (70-71). The metaphor continues for several lines, until Brachiano shifts to smell, saying that firing a cannon will cause Francisco to “get gunpowder in [his] nostrils” (74), to which Francisco responds, “Better that / Than change perfumes for plasters” (74-75). Tongues, ears, noses; a confrontation, but still no encounter. Soon, Brachiano will find himself struggling to “taste the circumstances” of Isabella’s and Camillo’s murders, which can be said to effectively *occur* before they *happen for* Brachiano. In fact, one can question whether Brachiano is ever supposed to successfully “taste” or phenomenologically encounter the murders.

Significantly, there is another, perhaps similar, struggle to encounter events phenomenologically in Shakespeare’s *Othello*, in which Othello is unsettled by the

possibility that events can occur prior to and without being phenomenized. Before confronting and eventually suffocating Desdemona, he too is fixated on sensory organs -- “noses, ears, and lips” -- as he struggles to determine the cause of his own “trembling” and “shak[ing],” certain that “nature would not invest herself in such shadowing passion without some instruction.” He believes, in other words, that he has somehow been made to shake because Desdemona is adulterous. Presumably assured of Desdemona’s guilt but desiring a confession from her handkerchief, Othello wonders if it is possible “first to be hanged, then to confess” (*Oth* 4.1.34-50). Othello, obsessed by the sensory organs and the relationship between his body and mind, seemingly conflates and confuses cause and effect because his trembling would not be reasonable otherwise.

Such moments of destabilization of sensory “authority” and causal relationships in early modern English drama invite a post- (but not quite anti-) humanist intervention. Whereas Renaissance anatomists did not account for the possibility that there might be something radically nonhumanizable about the events and objects that humans are supposed to be able to encounter with their senses, posthumanist affect theory critiques the necessity of encountering the world from a personal perspective, and indeed deconstructs the notion of a “personal perspective” in itself. For Massumi, affects do not originate with the human; though they can operate or be “territorialized” (a concept that he borrows from Deleuze) *on* the body, they are not actualized *by* the body (Massumi 186). They exist not only prior to but also without the body.

Perhaps most frustratingly (for early modern and present-day humanists alike), affects do not operate according to the logic of cause and effect. Othello demands a confession *after* his shaking body purportedly assures him that Desdemona is guilty. And

Brachiano cannot say that he is encountering the affects associated with his wife's murder simply because he is watching the murder happen nor can he be certain that he will react how he is presumably supposed to react upon watching the plot successfully carried out. That sensory or cognitive encounters cannot be effected in a logical, rational manner by the human mind or body would indeed be an anxiety-inducing possibility in a humanist environment in which the personal is supposed to be primary and the use of the senses is supposed to lead to knowledge.

Marco Abel, arguing that affect "is precisely that which comes first, ontologically as well as pragmatically," also employs the trope of "trembling" when he considers an example of this type of reversal of humanist assumptions about the personal:

For instance, it is because my hands tremble that I get nervous, rather than the other way around. My hands tremble because my body has infolded a multiplicity of forces that impinged upon me, but that are now absent (Abel 4.2).<sup>xxxiii</sup>

"First to be hanged, and then to confess" (*Oth* 4.1.38-39); as Massumi concludes in his "argument from synaesthesia," the nonhuman actualization of affect produces the personal because "the personal is the finale," the (non-effected) product rather than the cause of actualization (Massumi 191).

I am wary of suggesting that a posthumanist view of synaesthesia and affect can *explain* the moments of unencounterability in Webster's play, in part because, as Massumi regularly reminds readers, the "application" or explanatory model is all-too-humanist for posthumanist theory. However, I would argue that because *The White Devil* stages examples of and dramatizes anxieties related to the possibility that affects are

nonhuman and sometimes cannot be personalized, it makes sense to think the play posthumanistically. Holding posthumanist conceptions of affect up against Webster's play (as "T" struggle to avoid mirror and lens metaphors here), the difficulty/impossibility of sensory encounter that the play dramatizes becomes a telling instance of anxiety rather than a representation of failure.

It seems that most attempts at sensory encounter in *The White Devil* do indeed prove difficult or impossible: Brachiano, according to his speeches and the events of the play, struggles to understand and personalize the events occurring in his vicinity while Vittoria admits to the limits of understanding and encounter; Francisco recognizes what seems to be a ghost as a mere "melancholic thought" (4.1.98), a figure that he cannot encounter because, according to the early modern "reporting" model of the senses/brain relationship, one cannot personalize with the external senses something that is already seated in and was never located outside the brain (i.e. according to Crooke's view of proprioception). Only the lecherous pander Flamineo seems able to confidently believe that he is capable of "humanist" encounters.

Much unlike Francisco in his reaction to Isabella's "ghost," Flamineo decides that Bracciano's ghost – who silently holds up a skull and shovels dirt on his onetime brother-in-law – is "beyond melancholy" (5.4.139), not the product of a diseased mind. He then executes a willful misreading of the situation, quite certain that he knows what the ghost 'means for him' (a phrase that perhaps best reflects the humanist conception of how personalization operates); conveniently, the ghost has appeared, specifically for Flamineo, as a sign that he must now either receive his sister's "bounty" or kill her in order to avoid "disgrace" (141-46).

As he dies in the play's final scene, Flamineo at first imagines a phenomenology that begins and ends with the personal; he finally, however, seems to recognize his error, admitting that it is perhaps too easy to confuse humanist "knowledge" with the "knowledge" that is out there in the world, available for (nonhuman) actualization:

... I do not look

Who went before, nor who shall follow me;

No, at myself I will begin and end:

While we look up to heaven we confound

Knowledge with knowledge. O I am in a mist (5.6.255-259).

He does not atone for killing his brother, engineering Vittoria and Bracciano's relationship, or arranging one murder and carrying out another; he does come to the conclusion that though the "personal" seems to be produced and bounded by the body, it is a mistake to conflate sensory with humanistic – that is, personalized, meaningful – knowledge. While the sensory can in some cases produce meaning, it can also, as Brachiano's attempts at genuine, personalized sensory encounter remind the audience, serve as a reminder of the impossibility of encountering truly nonhumanizable, affective events.

## CONCLUSION: POSTHUMANISM IN THE HUMANITIES

If I were to now conclude that new media theory, posthumanism, and early modern drama “speak to” one another, I would in a sense simply be reasserting the idea with which this dissertation began. Ending where I began would fly in the face of experimentation, which critics like Hayles and Massumi argue is central to posthumanist practices within the humanities. Instead, I want to use this space to discuss or review two concept-shifts that happen *to posthumanism* when it is placed next to or allowed to intervene in early modern English drama: (1) Posthumanism, though sometimes associated with radically anti-humanist schools of thought, can have a place in Renaissance studies and more generally, in the humanities, provided that it opens itself up to “readings,” and (2) While posthumanism and new media theory offer Renaissance studies ways of theorizing arepresentational signaletic forces on the early modern stage, they also call for a re-evaluation of the assumptions that anti-illusionism is restricted to Brechtian ideological critique and that asignifying signaletic and metamediative are radically unrelated. Theorizing the early modern stage from a posthumanist (and also historical) standpoint, in other words, changes the relationship between the Brechtian and Deleuzian anti-illusionisms discussed in Chapter 3.

As Chapters 2, 3, and 4 demonstrate, there can be posthumanist readings of literary and dramatic works; literary studies does not have to do away with the reading if it is to think itself posthumanistically, and more importantly, posthumanism must incorporate the concept of reading or praxis or “readings” if it is to play a role in literary studies. Posthumanist practices can themselves *change* the concept of the “reading,”

forcing it to let o of what Massumi calls “application” and I term the “lens model” in Chapter 4. In this respect, posthumanism’s challenge to humanism, especially in its suggestion that readings are not necessarily the product of a human consciousness acting on a text, does not have to be construed as radically antihumanist or unfriendly to the humanities. Ultimately, posthumanism can change “reading,” and the need for “readings” in literary studies can engender shifts in posthumanism.

Massumi derives his critique of application from Jean-François Lyotard, who found the application or psychoanalysis to art and drama problematic because it was assumed that psychoanalytic theory would change the works under consideration, when in actuality, Lyotard knew, there had been an “infiltration of clinical thought by tragic themes drawn from Greek and Elizabethan drama” (Lyotard 156). For Lyotard, rejecting the application model meant challenging the pseudo-Freudian notion (or, the “humanist” Freud that Lacan found wanting) that literature is all about discovering hidden meanings and decoding the encoded. Literary works can mean what they say, and in some cases, need not “mean” at all. Lyotard, whose philosophy might be described as more structuralist than posthumanist (though Massumi borrows considerably from him), nevertheless rejects the idea that all readings and encounters take place only within the realm of the signifier. He describes the practice of reading all signs and objects as exhaustively representationalist as a “methodological nihilism” (157), an argument that posthumanism not only reasserts but also takes a step further: the arepresentational, according to posthumanist theory, is radically nonhuman and can be entirely nonhumanizable.

While New Historicism and cultural materialism have provided scholars and students working in the field of Renaissance literature with methods for examining the anxieties of representation circulating in sixteenth- and seventeenth century English culture (see, for example, Mazzio's and Lobanov-Rostovsky's descriptions of sensory and corporeal anxieties in Chapter 4), it has effected perhaps too sharp a poststructuralist turn, focusing so much on signification that it tends to overlook those aspects of early modern drama and experience that were about signs but not signifiers. Though the early modern arepresentational cannot be per se *recovered*, it is worth examining because so many anxieties of representation circulating within the theater and culture seem to have stemmed from concerns about the arepresentational, or the realm of noncontextualized signs. When Stephen Gosson claimed that English stage performance could not be properly contextualized and was therefore worthy of condemnation and when Webster staged characters'/personae's struggles to encounter that which could not be effected by the senses or processed by the brain, their concerns were not with *how* bodies, events, and sins were represented, but with *why* (un)certain aspects of bodies, events, and sins/signs could not be represented back to the mind or consciousness.

Thus, while concepts of the arepresentational and asignifying do not originate with posthumanism, posthumanist thought offers challenges to phenomenology and the valorization of the signifier strong enough to describe radically nonhuman and nonhumanizable encounters on and with the early modern stage. Once again, however, the early modern stage also invites a rethinking of posthumanist concepts, specifically, in this case, of anti-illusionism. First, as I hope to have demonstrated, because (proto-) Brechtian ideological critique alone does not sufficiently describe the multiple anti-



illusionisms operating on the early modern stage, descriptions of theatrical anti-illusionism need not be limited to Brecht's theories. Metrical anti-illusionism in early blank verse drama exemplifies the idea that metamediation on stage does not have to be limited to metatheatrics; signaletic anti-illusionism, meanwhile, emerged from the asignifying or arepresentational aspects of theatrical signs discussed in Chapter 3. And although the concept of signaletic anti-illusionism is borrowed from Hansen, who in turn derives his theory of the "sign that is what it signifies" from Deleuze and Guattari's work on asignifying images, it undergoes a shift when the signaletic is shown to have influenced proto-Brechtian anti-illusionism. When early modern anti-illusionism is examined, the Deleuzian and Brechtian are no longer quite so incommensurable. They oppose but inform one another.

In the introduction, I began to consider what posthumanist theory might do for early modern drama, and I believe that I have at least in part answered this question in several ways in the four chapters presented here. However, it is important to keep in mind that to repeatedly ask the question "what does the theory do for the drama?" is too much in keeping with the "lens" model in which the texts shift under the influence of the theory. Alternately, therefore, it is also worth examining the shifts to posthumanist theory that are necessitated by the intersections of posthumanism and early modern drama. Put another way, we might best consider what happens, what *emerges*, what *changes*, when the specifics of posthumanist theory meet the specifics of the early modern stage.

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Notes to Introduction

<sup>i</sup> Wolfe argues that the “iron man” Talus in Book V of Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* “erodes the moral and physical boundaries between humans and non-humans (machines, animals, stones) in order to consider which qualities, if any, demarcate humanity from, or elevate it above, its bestial and mechanical counterparts” (217). Renaissance “iron men” or “machine-men” call into question “what it means for a human to be like a machine or, for that matter, what it means for a machine to be lifelike” (240).

<sup>ii</sup> For example, scientists at the University of Reading recently developed a brain-like robot controlled by rat neurons. Neurologist Steven Novella has suggested on his weblog that although the scientists “avoid[ed] controversy” by using rat neurons instead of human neurons, the project nevertheless brings up important questions about what makes humans “human.”

Steven Novella, “Robot With a Biological Brain.” *Neurologica Blog* (August 14, 2008), <http://www.theness.com/neurologicablog/?p=356>, accessed February 16, 2009.

<sup>iii</sup> Mary Thomas Crane’s *Shakespeare’s Brain: Reading With Cognitive Theory* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2001) examines the figure of the “author” from this standpoint.

<sup>iv</sup> See, for example, the National Endowment for the Humanities’ and National Science Foundation’s “Digging Into Data Challenge” grant competition, which seeks to improve research techniques and access with regards to “large-scale” data repositories. “Digging Into Data Challenge,” <http://www.diggingintodata.org/>, accessed April 17, 2009.

A recent article in *Wired*, meanwhile, excitedly heralded the “end of theory” as a result of these large-scale repositories.

Chris Anderson, “The End of Theory: The Data Deluge Makes the Scientific Method Obsolete.” *Wired* 16:7 (June/July 2008).

<sup>v</sup> See the recent work of Richard Dawkins (especially *The God Delusion* [Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1996]) and commentaries on ScienceBlogs (<http://www.scienceblogs.com>), a collection of weblogs, many of which usefully critique religious ideologies that interfere with American education systems but demeaningly refer to postmodernism, a set of philosophies which in itself calls for the questioning of such ideologies, as “PoMo.”

<sup>vi</sup> All references to Shakespeare’s plays in this and subsequent chapters are from *The Arden Complete Works*, ed. Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson, and David Scott Kastan (London: Thomson Learning, 2001).

<sup>vii</sup> Massumi’s methods of “invention” and “experimentation,” though based on scientific practices, in no way suggest *applying* scientific concepts to the humanities. For further

discussion of Massumi's critique of the "application method" so familiar to the humanities, see Chapter 4.

### Notes to Chapter 1

<sup>viii</sup> According to page snapshots collected by the *Internet Archive* <<http://www.archive.org>>, a series of spam advertisers has parked at the URL <http://www.vrmldream.com> since April 2000.

<sup>ix</sup> Ironically, Bertolt Brecht, whose theories of drama were certainly not about "resolving contradictions," did precisely this in his adaptation of *The Duchess of Malfi*, adding lines from John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* in which a brother professes romantic love and sexual attraction to his sister.

<sup>x</sup> Cognitive load theory, developed by John Sweller in the mid-1990s, holds that because working memory is limited, it can be easily overwhelmed by multimedia, which may require a learner to process graphics, text, animation, and hyperlinks simultaneously. See Bruning, Schraw, Norby, and Ronning, *Cognitive Psychology and Instruction* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2004), Chapter 10 for an introduction.

<sup>xi</sup> Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (New York: Columbia UP, 1989).

<sup>xii</sup> For a discussion of the differences between concepts of authorship in the Elizabethan era and concepts of authorship after the eighteenth century, see Chapter 5 of Irvin Matus' *Shakespeare, In Fact* (New York: Continuum, 1999). Matus refutes the argument that another author wrote the entire body of work attributed to Shakespeare by explaining the ways in which the claim that one man wrote another man's plays is historically incorrect; "the idea of inventing stories and plots, and the characters to populate them," he notes, "might even have seemed wasteful to the Elizabethan author, who was supplied a bottomless source of inspiration – all there for the taking" (127). Shakespeare, he notes, is unfortunately "usually judged by purely modern standards" (128).

### Notes to Chapter 2

<sup>xiii</sup> G.K. Hunter claims that Shakespeare's plays, especially when compared to their boys' company counterparts, were not only naturalistic but also relatively realistic. Additionally, Chapter 1 of Alexander Welsh's *Hamlet in His Modern Guises* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001) explains how Shakespeare transformed the *Hamlet* story from the political, "historically situated" tales told by Saxo Grammaticus and Belleforest into a novelistic play about the relationships between and within two families.

<sup>xiv</sup> Commenting on the Earl of Surrey's poetry, Puttenham writes: "This verse is a very good *Alexandrine*, but perchaunce would have sounded more musically, if the first word

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had been a disillable, or two monosyllables and not a trisillable” (60). Also, because English does not have the “currantness” of Greek and Latin feet, English poets must instead end lines on “a certaine tunable sound” (63) because “the chiefe grace of our vulgar Poesie consisteth in the Symphonie” (67).

<sup>xv</sup> Philip Auslander’s *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999) also uses rock culture to deconstruct the notion that “authenticity” is what allows us to determine the boundary between live and mediatized performance.

<sup>xvi</sup> Though the essay was published posthumously, John Willett dates it 1935-1936, basing his decision on Brecht’s letters and previous editors’ conclusions (Brecht 76).

<sup>xvii</sup> Stephen Buhler has described a similar ideological critique operating in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*: Cassius, in full Epicurean mode, “debunk[s] Roman superstition and point[s] out the political consequences of credulous belief,” and “endeavors to show how both the powerful and those who challenge that power can transform terrifying supernatural events into political strategies” (318-321).

Stephen M. Buhler, “No Spectre, No Sceptre: The Agon of Materialist Thought in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*,” *English Literary Renaissance* 26:2 (Spring 1996): 313-332.

<sup>xviii</sup> See the ACT-R website at <<http://act-r.psy.cmu.edu/>> (Department of Psychology, Carnegie Mellon University) for the software, hundreds of related articles and studies, and source code.

<sup>xix</sup> Though he finds verse “improbable,” Howard is nevertheless more concerned with decorum than realism. (In fact, his main concern, as he explains it in a note “To The Reader” appended to his play *The Duke of Lerma*, is that verse makes it too easy to make something out of nothing in drama [*Duke* 3].) He notes that England, unlike other nations, is “not so happily” known for indecorously “interweaving Mirth and Sadness” in its plays. He also advises that an event should not be “presented” onstage simply because it is “possible” offstage (*Four Plays* 4). And ironically, he labels the issue of “improbability” on which he bases his argument “trivial” (5).

<sup>xx</sup> Early English novels regularly took on the form of fictional “found” letters, or travelogues that the reader was supposed to believe were true. Less than a century after the novel’s inception into English culture, some novels began to call attention to their own fictional constructs and/or materiality in order to question exactly how natural, or how consciousness-like, the book that readers held in their hands was. In 1741, Henry Fielding’s *Shamela* (an overt parody of Samuel Richardson’s popular *Pamela*) made clear to its readers the artifice involved in constructing an epistolary novel: we cannot necessarily trust letters from a young woman to her parents to accurately relate the story of “what really happened,” and no one would neatly narrate the details of her life through

letters in the way that the Pamela character does. Fielding's parody calls attention to the fact that what readers might have accepted as "natural" in Richardson's novel was hardly natural at all. Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, meanwhile, rejected already-established conventions in that it did not allow its readers to fully adopt the perspective of the main character, who is conceived and dies within the frame of the story he narrates. Sterne points to the novel's materiality (the fact that it is external, not internal, to its readers) by inserting blank pages and squiggled lines into the printed text.

### Notes to Chapter 3

<sup>xxi</sup> Deborah Burks, who explores how *The Changeling* reflects anxieties about women's vulnerability in a society in which "rape" is defined as "stealing" a woman, argues that "Beatrice-Joanna assumes that the motive that drives men is desire for property." " 'I'll Want My Will Else': *The Changeling* and Women's Complicity With Their Rapists." *ELH* 62:4 (1995), 775.

<sup>xxii</sup> See Burks 783 n 45 for references to and descriptions of a number of these tests.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Susan Zimmerman, questioning why the early modern English theater often metatheatrically called attention to the difficulties of staging death, argues that the English found the corpse, a "transhistorical signifier," problematic because its "signifying function could not be separated from that of the body" (1). This may have also brought up questions of how a 'live' body onstage could signify death. *The Early Modern Corpse and Shakespeare's Theatre* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2005).

<sup>xxiv</sup> Ramie Targoff points out that anti-theatrical tracts' claims that scripted performance leads to real effects and inward change in actors and audience members would ironically align Puritans like Prynne with the "wrong" side of the debate about the Book of Common Prayer, in favor of scripts. Puritans were against all forms of theatricality in the Church of England. "The Performance of Prayer: Sincerity and Theatricality in Early Modern England," *Representations* 60 (Fall 1997).

<sup>xxv</sup> See Ryan Netzley's article "Oral Devotion: Eucharistic Theology and Richard Crashaw's Religious Lyrics" for a discussion of the sometimes uncomfortable connections between the practice/concept of the Eucharist and sensual/sensuous functions of taste. *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 44:3 (Fall 2002), 247-272.

In a special issue entitled *Shakespeare and Science*, William N. West discusses early modern debates about the physical impossibility of transubstantiation. "What's the Matter With Shakespeare? Physics, Identity, Playing." *South Central Review* 26: 1 and 2 (Winter and Spring 2009): 103-126.

More general anxieties of ingestion were discussed at the 2009 Renaissance Society of America meeting by a panel entitled "Animal and Human Interfaces in Early Modern

Culture” (Los Angeles, March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2009). Susan Zimmerman explored the marriage of the “sacred” and “profane” in Christians’ eating purified, “sacralized” pork. Elizabeth Harvey, building on her prior work on the early modern cultural view of the sense of touch, examined the ways in which eating meat constituted ingesting not only signs but also interfaces between humans and animals.

<sup>xxvi</sup> See, for instance, Hansen’s and Massumi’s texts, as well as Marco Abel, *Violent Affect* (U of Nebraska P, 2007) and Patricia Ticiento Clough, ed. *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (Duke UP, 2007). The essays in Clough examine social implications of signalitic affects radically detached from context and causation.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Stephen Hilliard suggests that Gosson’s argument depends on a “low estimation of the audience.” In my view, Gosson’s “low estimation” does not assume that the audience is naïve and easily deceived by what is performed on stage, but rather assumes that negative acts will always have negative effects because most audiences are incapable of careful judgement. Stephen Hilliard, “Stephen Gosson and the Elizabethan Distrust of the Effects of Drama.” *English Literary Renaissance* 9 (1979): 225-39.

<sup>xxviii</sup> In a review of the American Conservatory Theater production for *Shakespeare Bulletin*, Adrienne L. Eastwood points out that if the play has a “message” of sorts, it is that “one should be prepared to come to terms with betrayal, dishonesty, vice and horror” and that the “distance” provided by Jacobean costuming did little to diminish the play’s horror (179). Eastwood attributes these moments of horror to more than just blood; while some seventeenth-century plays referenced incest, *‘Tis Pity* directly staged it (182).

“*Tis Pity She’s a Whore* (review).” *Shakespeare Bulletin* 27:1 (Spring 2009): 179-183.

#### Notes to Chapter 4

<sup>xxix</sup> Barbara Freedman’s *Staging the Gaze: Postmodernism, Psychoanalysis, and Shakespearean Comedy* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991) points out the ways in which film and performance theorists have not taken into account Lacan’s later revisions. Freedman makes clear early on that her project is not to repeatedly draw the conclusion that Shakespeare’s plots and characters resemble Lacanian narratives; Shakespeare studies, she writes, is “less a field on which to prove the truth of psychoanalysis than a means by which to rethink issues facing us today” (10).

<sup>xxx</sup> For a post- (but not anti-) humanist perspective on proprioception – and a post-virtual reality conception of “body image” in general – see Hansen, Chapter 2.

<sup>xxxi</sup> Further, as Charles H. Frey points out, the eye-beam theory reiterates some of the problems associated with the senses acting at a distance. In this case, when the see-er acts upon an object from a distance, sight becomes the privileged sense, which is problematic because most “imagery” in early modern plays is not sight-oriented (69).

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*Making Sense of Shakespeare* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1999).

<sup>xxxii</sup> Though there was an historical equivalent for Clarke, his purported ability to poison a victim by means of a portrait is an invention of *Arden of Faversham*'s author. The records collected in *Thomas Arden in Faversham: The Man Behind the Myth* (Kent: Faversham Society, 1996) indicate that a painter named William Blackbourne may have supplied Alice Arden with poison to pour into her husband's broth, but neither Holinshed's *Chronicles* nor John Stow's account of the incident (reprinted in Kinney, 893-898) references a poisoned painting.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Abel also summarizes Massumi's Spinozan-Deleuzian argument about affects and causation: "To my mind, this characteristic of affect – that the effects affect produces exist in the absence of the effect's case – is one of the most crucial aspects that too often is ignored by those who have of late embraced this concept as a way of turning analysis back to practical concerns of the body/materiality and away from what many consider an overemphasis on textuality and overly theoretical matters. Affect, according to Massumi, cannot be reduced to traditional, teleological cause-and-effect terms. Affect in the Spinozian, and I might add Deleuzian, sense grounds any cause-and-effect logic, with the latter functioning merely as the contextual framework on which the prior force of affect eventually gets reterritorialized" (2.6).

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